

from J. E.

AN

ESSAY

ON THE

Indispensible NECESSITY of a
Holy and Good LIFE

TO THE

HAPPINESS of HEAVEN.

SHEWING,

That this Necessity, according to the
plain tenor of the Gospel, is with-
out *any* Reserve or Exception.

WITH

A PRACTICAL IMPROVEMENT of the
Argument.

By WILLIAM WISHART, D.D.

Principal of the College of *Edinburgh*.

L O N D O N :

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M DCC LII.

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Indisputable Necessity of a

Holy and Good Life

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THE SECOND

Part of this New and enlarged Edition
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— Mr. Hamilton and Latimer at Edinburgh.

MDCCLXXII.

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my Office~~

THE

P R E F A C E.

THE Chief Matter contained in the following Papers appears to me, after a long and deliberate consideration, to be the Truth of God, plainly declared in his Word: and all who agree with me in this, must also own, that it is Truth of the greatest Importance to the Souls of Men; and most necessary to be laid before *all* Sinners, for awakening them, and warning them to *flee from the wrath to come*; and before *all* good *Christians* for their satisfaction and encouragement, and for exciting them to their Duty: so that, this Publication stands in need of no Apology. I have, indeed, been long and strongly Prompted to it by my own Heart, as the best Service I could think it in my Power to do, for the Honour of God, and the great-

est good of my Fellow-creatures. And I thought I could not better employ the few leisure-hours I might have, at a time when some necessary affairs took me off, for a while, from my Ordinary station of usefulness in the Church, than by collecting into one view what I had delivered, on several Occasions, upon this important Argument: as several of the most attentive and judicious Hearers have expressed an earnest desire of having a more deliberate view of it.

As to the Stile of these papers: the only thing I have studied is, to *use all Plainness of speech*: and, if any where I have risen to a Warmth, or strength, of expression, it is rather that I have been led on to it by the Subject itself, than that I have studied it. I am sensible that the Stile, in many places, is loose, and full of words and repetitions: but this has often appeared to me necessary, in speaking to the bulk of mankind, and combating inveterate prejudices. I doubt not, a Critical Eye may find many faults and inequalities in the Stile, which I have not been
very

P R E F A C E.

very anxious to prevent; many, which I have not been able either to discover or to help. But I wish these Papers to be read, rather with a serious Attention to the Matter of them, than with a Critical Attention to the Stile. - If in *that* any candid and well-disposed person shall think I have fallen into any Mistake, especially in my main Argument; His friendly admonitions shall be thankfully received, and respectfully Answered; and I shall either acknowledge my mistake, when discovered to me, owning my Obligation to him for the discovery; or give the reasons why I am not Convinced of any: provided He sets his Name to his performance, as I have done mine, that I may know what Degree of respect is due to his Character in the World. But, if any nameless and careless Writer shall in the spirit of bitterness, or contempt, discover ill-nature, by way of shewing Wit; bring a *railing accusation* against me, instead of Argument; and impute to bad, or sinister designs, what I know to be written with the most honest purpose;

I believe the Impartial World will reckon, that neglect and forgiveness is the most proper treatment I can give to such an Adversary. Mean time, I earnestly recommend these Papers to a serious perusal; and to the Blessing of God, which alone can make them effectual for any good purpose.

Mistake, especially in my own mind. His friendly and respectful treatment, be thankfully received, and respectfully Answered; and I shall still be obliged to knowledge my mistake, when directed to me; owing my Obligation to him for the discovery; or give me reasons why I am not convinced of

any, provided the Lord will, to his performance, as I have done mine, that I may know what Degree of respect is due to his Character and his World. But if my mistake is not corrected, I shall be the more of it, either by way of showing Will, being a rising nation, and having no doubt, THE

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AN
E S S A Y
 ON THE
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OF all the snares whereby the *deceitfulness that is in sin* betrays sinners, and *bardens* them in a vicious course, there is none more dangerous than their *flattering* themselves they may go on securely in sin, in the hopes of *setting all to rights at last*, by a late or a death-bed repentance. There is hardly any snare in which so many sinners are caught, to their utter ruin. Few, if any, who have only the light of nature and moral conscience to guide them, as all mankind have, can be supposed absolutely insensible, that an obsti-

nate vicious disposition is inconsistent with the true happiness of a reasonable creature: there are none who are favoured with the light of the Gospel, and have any regard to it, but may easily be sensible of the inconsistency of such a disposition with *that* happiness of the other world, which is there brought to light. Scarce any one, therefore, who professes Christianity, can be supposed so hardened in impiety as not to be apprehensive that he is unsafe in a vicious course; that his *present* state is bad and dangerous; that he must be ruined for ever, if he *always* continues in it: but wrong notions and presumptuous hopes of the mercy of God, vain apprehensions of the easiness of that repentance *at last*, the hardness of which makes him put it off *now*, concur with the sinner's love of his vicious lusts and evil ways, to make him flatter himself he may go on all his life in that beloved indulgence, and make himself easy in the hopes of retrieving all at last, by a late regrave and dying sorrow for an ill-spent life.

Nor are *they* only caught in this snare, who deliberately put off their repentance to the very *last*, and do not so much as *resolve* to set about it 'till then; but they also who (though they resolve to *begin* their repentance more early, so as to live religiously and virtuously for *some part* of their lives, yet) put it off from time to time, to a more convenient

nient season, as they think, when they hope to be in a better disposition, or more advantageous circumstances, for it; till by constantly delaying from one time to another, and yielding more and more by degrees to sloth, and thus letting their aversion to repentance, and their love to sin, grow upon them, they are thoughtlessly and inconsiderately drawn into the snare of putting off their repentance to the very last, though this was not their first intention. There is something vastly encroaching and ensnaring in this humour of delaying and putting off, when once it seizes a man as to any thing; it insensibly gains ground by degrees; and what a man durst not adventure downright to neglect, or resolve to let alone, he is effectually drawn in to neglect by delaying it: as the sluggard saith, "Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep;" not daring to speak it out even to himself at the first, that he will take a great deal; though in reality it comes to that, and he is drawn on by degrees to abandon himself to absolute fortifness and stupidity; so the slothful and secure sinner flatters himself he shall repent time enough, though he goes on but a little longer in a course of vicious indulgence; till by delaying and putting off from one time to another, the power and deceitfulness of sin growing upon him, he is unawares and effectually

drawn into the snare of putting off to the very last.

Seeing then this is so common and so dangerous a snare, such as men may be so easily led into without being aware of it; it is certainly a most charitable office, and the most proper business of ministers of Christ, which their love to the souls of men (if they have any) cannot fail to prompt them to, to warn men against this snare; and to dwell sometimes upon arguments of this nature.

This too is useful, not only for those who are in danger of being caught and held in this snare, but also for such as have happily escaped it. What a vast comfort must the consideration of this unspeakable danger give to those who have happily entred into a pious and virtuous course, and made some good progress in it? who can, on good grounds, reflect upon it, that their most important work is not yet to begin, but is happily advancing? how may they rejoice in their happy choice, and *bless the Lord who hath given them counsel*? In fine, *some things* which may be suggested upon this argument may be applied to shew, even to *them*, the necessity of not resting upon the beginnings of goodness, or any advances in it they have yet attained to, but constantly endeavouring after further improvements; and reaching forward to that perfection of holiness, which is the foundation of perfect happiness.

Now

Now to shew the unspeakable folly and danger of going on in a sinful course in the hopes of retrieving All at last by a late or a death-bed repentance, many strong and weighty considerations have been well illustrated and warmly enforced by wise and good men, by faithful ministers of Christ: such as these; the uncertainty of any man's having time and opportunity afterwards for that repentance which he now delays and puts off; the uncertainty of a sinner's being in a better disposition for repentance or finding it more easy afterwards; or rather, the certainty of his being in a worse disposition for it, and finding it more difficult, when his heart is further *hardened by the deceitfulness that is in sin*, and the force of vicious habits further strengthened by indulgence; and God more provoked to withdraw and withhold his grace, by a long and frequent resisting of his calls, and hardening the heart against his gracious invitations; so that the longer a sinner delays betaking himself to a better course, the more he is likely to defer it, and there is no end of delaying.

And as the common and natural issue of a sinner's delaying his repentance is putting it off to the very last; to shew the yet greater absurdity and danger of this, such further considerations as *these* have been urged with great force of argument and warmth of expostulation: that none of us knows but our

death may be sudden, and surprising, or attended with such circumstances as to rob us of all opportunity, or capacity, for that repentance which we put off 'till then : that it is the greatest madness to put off a thing of the greatest importance, of absolute necessity, to a few moments of distress, hurry and confusion : how easily *then* may a man impose upon himself, by a false and unavailing repentance ; a mere regret for an ill-spent life, when under terrible apprehensions, or *a fearful looking for of judgment*, which is far from being true repentance, as not being attended with any *thorough change* to the better ; as the after-lives of those who, in the prospect of death, have felt very deep regret, and the most piercing sorrow, have too often and too plainly shewn ? how peculiarly hard is it *then* to attain to true repentance, and especially to carry it to any length of improvement, and to be sure of it ? so that, even supposing the dying sinner should reap the benefit of it in the other world, it is scarce possible he should reap the comfort of it in this : that there is a present pain and disquiet of mind in a vicious course, which the sinner can no way get rid of while he continues in it ; as there are present pleasures and satisfactions in a course of piety and virtue, which a man irrecoverably loses so long as he delays entering upon it, was he ever so sure of saving his soul at last.

Such

Such weighty considerations as these have already employed the discourses and pens of the best preachers and writers upon religious subjects; who appear to me to have so much exhausted the matter of these arguments, that scarce any thing remains to be said upon them: and, after so many excellent writers, I should scarce have thought of publishing any thing upon this subject, if something beyond *all* these considerations had not occurred to my mind in the study of the Holy Scriptures, with an evidence I could not get over, and a force of conviction I could not resist, *viz.* “ That the very possibility, or, “ at least, all hope of retrieving the misery “ of an ill-spent life, and escaping the “ wages of sin in another world, by a late “ or death-bed repentance, is absolutely excluded by the nature and design of religion, and by the strain of the plainest “ decisions of the Holy Scriptures, particularly of the New Testament; that the “ absolute necessity of a *holy life* to the happiness of heaven, without any reserve or “ exception, is *there* most plainly declared, “ in the strongest terms; that this is not the “ sound of a single text or two, but the “ strain and tenor of numbers of the plainest “ passages of Holy Writ; and that there “ is no promise, nor instance, in the whole “ word of God, of that repentance being “ accepted of Him at last, or availing to “ obtain

“ obtain the happiness of the other world,
 “ which comes not till the last moment or
 “ hour of life ; far less, which is purposely
 “ deferred till then.”

This is a length, which I can observe none of the best writers on this argument to have gone : many of them have shewn a particular shyness about it : nay, most of them have directly contradicted it : and yet it is a length which the word of God plainly obliges me to go.

But, before I enter upon the illustration of this argument, may I not stop a little to bewail the madness of sinners in their vicious courses ; that, if they can allege but a bare possibility of indulging themselves in vice, and yet being saved at last, they will venture their All upon this possibility ; even though it be manifestly a thing so extraordinary, and out of the usual course of Divine conduct, as it may justly be reckoned *next to impossible* ! Who, in his right wits, would ever act so foolish a part, or run such a risk, in matters of infinitely less importance to him than the concerns of his soul and eternity ! And yet, so it is ; so we see it, in too many instances ; so far does mens love to their darling vices insatuate them, that they will thus trifle in matters of the last importance to them, and sport themselves with their own deceivings ; that, if they can flatter themselves with a meer possibility of retaining
 their

their vices to the last, and *then* saving their souls, upon this they will venture!

This, with other considerations, has made it appear of the greatest importance to me, that, if it can be done with truth and evidence, even this possibility, wherein they trust, should be taken from them; that the desperate, obstinate sinner should be deprived of this only and most wretched refuge, upon which he is apt to go on securely in a vicious course.

But, when I represent it as a thing impossible, "that a man should go on in a vicious course to the last, and *then* obtain the "salvation of his soul," I am far from intending to limit the almighty power of God, to whom *all things are possible*, which do not involve a *contradiction*, *i. e.* which are any real objects of power; provided, too, they are not inconsistent with his moral character: but many things are in this sense possible, which are so contrary to all the well-known order of nature, or stated course of providence, that hardly any man would say concerning them, meerly on account of *this* possibility, so much as that "they *may be*;" far less that "they *ever will be*." One plain instance may suffice, at present, for illustrating this: it is equally possible, equally easy for the Divine Power, that the sun should rise to-morrow in the West as in the East; and yet, the man would appear very ridiculous who

who should say, "*it may be the sun shall rise in the West to-morrow.*" Far less, if God, by whose power alone a thing can be brought about, declares *it shall never be*, is any man to entertain the thought that *it may be* it shall come to pass, merely because it is conceivable and consistent, a real object of power, and, with regard to the Divine Power, possible. If the God of truth, by whose power alone it is supposed a thing can be brought about, has declared "*it shall not be,*" it may, to all *intents* and purposes, be considered as a thing impossible that it should ever happen; and no more is the least expectation of it to be entertained than if the very notion of it, or the terms in which it is expressed, involved the plainest absurdity and contradiction. And that this is, in reality, the case, with regard to "*a sinner's going on in a vicious course to the last, and then escaping future punishment, by any repentance he can then make,*" that the plain decisions of God in his word stand against it, and declare *it shall never be*, 'tis the purpose of my present attempt to shew.

And though the clearest evidences and strongest proofs I am to adduce, to this purpose, are taken from the plain and positive declarations of Holy Scripture, particularly of the Gospel, by which *life and immortality is brought to light*; yet there are not want-
ing

ing considerable proofs to the same purpose, drawn from the nature and reason of things; from the unalterable nature of God, with *whom we have to do*; from the nature of man, and the condition in which he is placed in this world; from the great design of religion; and the nature of true, of rational and virtuous, happiness. These it may be proper to consider a little, in the first place; as they may give some light to the declarations of Scripture concerning this matter, as well as derive a good deal from them. I shall not here enter into the enquiry whether, and how far, a future state of happiness may be *demonstrated* by the light of nature and reason alone, without any assistance from Divine Revelation: but, upon the supposition of such a state, it may be shewn, with the greatest evidence of reason, that not only beginnings, but considerable improvements in virtue, are necessary to fit us for the happiness of it. And that,

I. From the nature of God, on whose unalterable Nature and moral Character the surest reasonings in religion are founded. Not only does our happiness intirely depend upon Him: this is the case, even with regard to our *inferior* enjoyments, of whatever kind; *all* depend upon Him, the author of our frame, and of *all* our capacities, who “giveth us richly *all* things to enjoy.” it is the case of the creatures *below* us; “the eyes
“ of

“ of *all* things wait upon Him, and He
 “ giveth them their food in due season; He
 “ openeth his hand and filleth them with
 “ good.” But *our* chief happiness lies in
 Him, in his favour and fellowship: now to
 maintain this, a conformity in our temper
 and prevailing disposition to his moral cha-
 racter is necessary.

Now it is the unalterable property of his
 nature, that he is perfectly holy, entirely
 removed and averse from *all* moral pollu-
 tion and defilement: from whence we may
 certainly conclude, that “ evil cannot dwell
 “ with Him;” that the wicked and impure
 can have no *fellowship* with Him; for He
 “ hateth all the workers of iniquity:” with-
 al, He “ looks not only on the outward ap-
 “ pearance,” as men do, but “ looks into
 “ the heart;” and therefore, regards not
 the specious professions, and fairest outward
 appearances, where the *heart* is *not right*
with him; and where *it is*, that will appear
 in the tenor of the life and conduct; for
 “ a good man, out of the good treasure of
 “ his heart, bringeth forth good things.”

What excellent specimens of such argu-
 ings do the Holy Scriptures give us, in short
 and strong expressions? 1 Jo. i. 5, 6, 7.
 “ God is light, and in Him is no darkness
 “ at all;” His whole conduct is perfectly
 pure, and will abide the strongest light; He
 is intirely removed from any *fellowship* with
 those

those *works of darkness*, which are naturally odious, and shun the light: and therefore, “if we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: but if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another.” Some more of these scriptural reasonings will occur afterwards. But, from what has been offered, it plainly appears, from the unalterable moral character of God, that it is only so far as we improve in goodness and moral excellency, that we can increase in His favour, and advance to our true happiness in *fellowship with him*; and that, to be perfectly happy, we must be perfectly holy and good.

2. Let us consider, in the same view, the nature of man, and the condition in which he is placed in this world. His mind is endued with the noblest capacities, both for contemplation and for action; and the seeds of good affections, of benevolence and the love of goodness, are implanted in our frame: but these capacities must be *improved* by careful exercise, in order to their being put to their proper *uses*, and our reaping the *advantage* of them and the *enjoyments* for which they qualify us. These seeds of goodness must be cherished by diligent culture, in order to their arriving at that extent and improvement in knowledge, in goodness, and divine love, which will issue in a compleat

and confirmed state of piety and virtue, and of rational and virtuous happiness. When first we receive the happy turn and disposition, to set about this culture and improvement in good earnest, we are then *entered* on the true way to happiness: but a great part of our work remains, to carry forward these good beginnings; and we cannot, certainly, be reckoned to have *finished* this work when we have only *begun* it. Moreover, we are creatures of a mixed frame: as we have spirits formed for the noblest purposes, so we have bodies of earth liable to various frailties: in order to the support of these bodies, and to suit our present condition in this world, we are endowed with various appetites and passions; which, in their regular state, are not only useful but necessary to our present frame and *situation*; but are apt, without careful restraint and watchful culture, to grow extravagant and excessive: and we are surrounded with various objects, suited to these inferior appetites and passions, which are apt to draw us off from those spiritual exercises and improvements that belong and contribute to the perfection and happiness of our *better part*: it therefore becomes a matter of great and long exercise, to regulate our *inferior* passions and appetites, and bring them into due order; to cultivate and improve the affections of divine love and brotherly kindness; to subdue the flesh

to

to the spirit, and bring our lower appetites into subjection to our more exalted affections: this is a work, according to all the views reason and experience give us of it, not to be performed at *once*; not without *frequent* efforts, and a constant struggle: and this is our exercise here, in this state of *imperfection*; in order to our advancement to a state of *perfection* and complete happiness in a better world, where virtue shall be *triumphant*, and become superior to all disturbance or opposition.

3. If we further consider the nature of our true happiness; we must be sensible, that it is of no such importance to our happiness what *place* we are in, as what *spirit* we are of; what *enjoyments* we are possessed of, and what *temper* we are in to relish them: if our minds are formed into the temper of bliss, and we enjoy the highest satisfactions our nature is capable of, we shall be happy *wherever* we have that temper and enjoyment; but, if we are destitute of the temper of bliss, change of place will signify nothing; for we can be happy *no where*. Heaven, therefore, is not so much a different *place* from that where we now are, as a different *state* from the present; and it is by the *temper* of our minds we must make our *approaches* to it. The *perfection* of any creature is the foundation of its *happiness*; and the *utmost* happiness any creature is capable

of, is only to be obtained in the state of its *utmost* perfection: and as the true perfection of *such* creatures as *we* are, consists in rational and virtuous improvements, it is only so far as we advance in these that we can enjoy our true happiness; and, in all nature, the most perfect state of any creature does not take place *all at once*, but arises from *small beginnings*, by a *gradual* and beautiful *progress*. We are creatures formed not barely for contemplation, but for action and employment; to be useful to one another, and to find our perfection and happiness, not only in the contemplation of the most glorious object of our thoughts, but in the proper exercise of our active powers. The Abilities our great Creator has furnished us with, the Affections he has implanted in our hearts, the Circumstances in which he has placed us in His world, do plainly shew us formed by Him not to be *idle*, or meerly *contemplative*, but *active* and *useful* creatures; and thus to improve in a truly amiable character, and a capacity for happiness in the most perfect society: a happiness founded in a temper of intire good affection to the general welfare of the rational world; and of hearty devotion, and allegiance to the kind Father and universal Governor of the rational kingdom: for, not only are we formed for the exercise of love and beneficence towards those of our own kind; but
for

for a more extensive exercise of kindness and good-will towards the whole body of reasonable beings ; and the highest love and devotion to the perfectly wise and good Governour of the world ; a hearty affection to his government, by which the general happiness is secured ; an intire submission to his orders, and resignation to *all* his wise appointments. This temper and conduct is the most proper exercise and improvement of our noblest powers ; the true perfection of our nature ; and the foundation of our highest happiness, which *must* be founded in the disposition of our minds : this Temper will afford the greatest enjoyment we can have in our *present* state, so far as it prevails ; and, in its Perfection, is the foundation of the highest and most lasting joy : and we can only advance towards perfect bliss, so far as we improve in this. To promote such a Temper, and an answerable conduct, is the great purpose and Design of true and valuable Religion ; which, when received in its proper influence into the heart, has the most direct and powerful tendency this way. True religion, as it presents us with a just object of our most delightful contemplation, our highest veneration and love, our most intire devotion and resignation, in the infinitely glorious and blessed God ; so it greatly strengthens *all* those dispositions of goodness and integrity, which belong to a truly

worthy and amiable character: this it does by the influence of the most glorious and perfect Example; and the love of the perfection of goodness and righteousness, animating us to imitate that great object of our love and adoration: by a regard and Reverence for the greatest and most awful presence and observation: by the Authority of that great *Lawgiver, who is able to save or to destroy*: and, in fine, by a regard to the favour and Approbation of the great and good Governour of the world; who, as he is *the righteous Lord, loveth righteousness*. The great design of religion, therefore, is to make us good and useful *here*, and thus train us up to happiness *hereafter*.

To conclude this branch of the argument: *all* enjoyment, of any kind, necessarily supposes a taste for that kind of enjoyment; nor can our satisfaction, in any entertainment, rise higher than our relish for it is improved. Now, the true happiness of such creatures as *we* are is not to be found in the whole circle of outward things, nor in the highest gratifications of sense; but in such rational and virtuous-enjoyments, as a meer sensual man has no relish for; in which no man can have delight, but so far as he is improved in true goodness and divine love, has subdued the flesh to the spirit, and brought his *inferior* appetites in subjection to those *nobler* dispositions. So that it is a maxim evidently

founded in nature and reason, that *grace is glory begun, and glory is grace perfected.*

But the proofs of this great point drawn from the declarations of Holy Scripture are peculiarly striking; and should be of special force with those who profess to believe the Christian Revelation, and to derive their chief comfort and hopes of future happiness from it: they are taken from these considerations.

1. From the consideration of the great design of Christianity, and of our Blessed Saviour's coming into the world, and his death.

2. From the representations the word of God gives us of the great business of a Christian, and his preparation for the heavenly bliss, as a progressive work; only *begun* in his first conversion; and to be gradually carried on to it's proper improvement and perfection, by the course of a holy and good life, and a faithful striving against sin. Agreeably to which,

3. The promises of future happiness are all along, throughout the tenor of Holy Scripture, made to a holy and good life; without the least hint of the alternative, that the person who has neglected it bitterly regrets that neglect at last: and the threatnings of future misery against the *workers of iniquity*, are made without any reserve or exception, particularly, without the exception of a man's repenting at last that he had been so.

4. God

4. God expressly threatens to give a deaf ear to their cries at last, and in the day of their distress, who refuse to hearken to his calls in time.

5. There is no *one* promise in the whole Word of God which gives the least countenance or encouragement to the hopes of happiness upon a late or death-bed repentance. Nor,

6. Is there any *one* instance in Holy Writ, of a sinner's being accepted of God, or admitted into the happiness of heaven, upon such a repentance.

7. Lastly, The conduct of our blessed Saviour and his Apostles, in calling sinners to repentance, is perfectly agreeable to, and a confirmation of, the plan here maintained. In the

First place, It is plainly declared to be the main design of the Gospel, and of our blessed Saviour's coming into the world, and his death, to recover and reclaim men from sin and vice, and bring them back to that conformity to God in holiness and goodness, in which (and in his favour) their only true happiness lies. In compassion to the wretched circumstances of sinful men, fallen from their true happiness and become miserable, by having fallen from true goodness, and become wicked and rebellious against God; the Son of God came into this world, to deliver men from this degenerate and miserable

ferable condition. It may be obvious to an attentive and serious consideration, that, in this wretched state of human nature, our sin and moral depravity is, in its own nature and influence, the worst part of our calamity, and cause of all the rest; and it is only so far as we are delivered from this, that we can be freed from those evils which naturally attend it and follow upon it. And therefore it *must* be the chief design of a Saviour, who would effectually deliver us from misery, and bring us to true happiness; in the first place to save us from our vices, and bring us back to holiness and goodness; and not merely to such low and faint beginnings of goodness, as can go but a very little way to restore our peace and promote our inward enjoyment; but to such improvements in all piety and virtue, as may be a natural progress towards a state of perfection in holiness, the foundation of perfect bliss.

Accordingly, when Christ came into the world as the Saviour, and had that name given to him by divine appointment, from what Salvation is it that He is so called? *Matt. i. 21.* "Thou shalt call His name *"Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sins."* This is also declared by the great design of all that he did and suffered for our redemption; of that depth of ignominy He submitted to bear, and those bitter sufferings He endured for our sakes; in which,

which, *Tit. ii. 14.* He "gave Himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and might purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works." and the final issue of this gracious design is thus described; *Eph. v. 25—27.* "Christ loved the church; and gave Himself for it, that He might sanctify and cleanse it, with the washing of water by the word; that he might present it to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish."

For bringing about this great salvation; and leading his people to their true happiness, by the natural way to it, purity and goodness; among other offices our Redeemer sustains, He is set forth to us as bearing the character of our great Master and Instructor, our Leader and Commander; and, as such, He has delivered to us the most full and clear instructions, concerning those things that belong to the improvement and perfection of our nature, our peace and happiness: these instructions our great Lord and Master has delivered to us, as His commands; enjoining our observation of them by His authority, and enforcing it by all the ties of love we are under to Him: nor is it left entirely upon our ingenuity, or gratitude, whether we will obey them, or not; but, as they are the laws of our great King
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and Lawgiver, they are enforced by the most awful *sanctions*: on the one hand, Christ is declared to be the *Author of eternal salvation to all them that obey Him*; and the most encouraging promises of *eternal life* are made to “them who, by a *patient continuance in well-doing*, seek for glory, honour and immortality;” and, on the other hand, the most fearful and *everlasting punishments* are denounced against all who *go on in their trespasses*, and will not, by all the methods of Divine mercy, be reclaimed.

Agreeably to all this, three things are, by the tenor of the Gospel, required of us, in order to our eternal salvation; which are all declared absolutely necessary to it; and, withal, are set forth as answering such *different purposes* in that great affair, as, if duly considered, might suffice to show, that no one of them can supercede the necessity of the others. I. *Faith* in Jesus Christ; whereby we heartily receive Him as our Saviour and Lord: this is required, in order to our obtaining a right and title to salvation, according to the tenor of the Gospel-covenant; whereby our renewed title to that happiness, we had forfeited by our sin and rebellion, is founded on the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ, and His *obedience unto death*; in which God shows His love to holiness and perfect virtue: and in this perfect merit we are interested, by receiving Christ as our Saviour

Saviour and our Lord. This faith, also, is fundamentally necessary to our receiving His instructions, and obeying His commands.

2. *Repentance*: not a meer Sorrow for sin; however deep and piercing: this is required, only as subservient to that Amendment, in which repentance consists: and never, throughout the whole Scripture, is repentance required of a dying sinner, as the fruitless close of a bad life; but always of men in life, as the fruitful beginning of a holy and good life.

3. *Holiness* of heart and life: not meer beginnings of goodness; but a constant progress, and a *patient continuance in well-doing*: nor is this required as an *arbitrary condition* of our obtaining future happiness; which, it might be thought the supreme Lord and Judge might dispense with at pleasure; but as, in the nature of the thing, a *necessary preparation for it*; and therefore, by no means to be dispensed with. So that, of these three things, required by the Gospel to our eternal salvation; we may observe; that no *one* of them can supply the place of any of the *others*, or supersede the necessity of the rest; because it does not answer the *purpose*, for which they serve, in order to our salvation. By *faith* in Christ we obtain a *right* to the heavenly inheritance: but as an infant-heir, though he has a *right* to the estate, is not to enter upon the *possession* of it, 'till he arrives at the *age* at which he is presumed

sumed *fit* to use and enjoy it; so the true
 believer, though *intitled* to the heavenly in-
 heritance, is not to come to the *possession* of
 it, 'till the sovereign and all-seeing Disposer
 of it sees him *meet* to enter upon it; which
 he can only become by a *patient continuance*
in well-doing: and, as a holy life cannot
 supply the place of faith in Christ, to give us
 a right and title to the kingdom of heaven;
 no more can faith supply the place of a holy
 life, to make us meet and fit for it. True
 Faith in Christ regards His blood and righte-
 ousness, as the atonement and *propitiation*
 for the *sins* we *forfake*: but to regard it, as
 procuring an *indulgence* for us to *continue* in
 sin, would be the most horrid profanation;
 a *counting the blood of the Covenant, whereby*
we are sanctified, an unholy thing! *Re-*
pentance, 'tis plain, cannot supply the place
 of holiness; because the first beginnings of
 it are in order to our leading an holy life for
 the future; and are an *entrance* on that
 course of a *patient continuance in well-doing*,
 which leads to *glory, &c.* Further; of these
 things required by the Gospel, in order to
 our eternal salvation, holiness is the *end* of
 all the rest: and, therefore, not only are that
 repentance and faith *vain*, and of no avail
 to our salvation, which are not effectual
 principles of holiness; but even such true
 and sincere repentance and faith, as are ef-
 fectual principles, and real beginnings of

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holiness in the soul, are not sufficient to render us *immediately fit* for the heavenly bliss; 'till we make further improvements in holiness, by a course of obedience to the commands of Christ. And, for this, I might appeal to the experience of sincere Christians, who are *exercised unto godliness*, and in whose *hearts* are the *ways of God*; who know and find, that a great deal remains to be done, for *working out their salvation*; even after, by sincere faith and repentance, they are happily entered upon the way to it. A great deal remains to be done, in mortifying and subduing corrupt lusts and irregular passions, more and more; in practising all the duties of piety and virtue, of devotion to God, and an useful life among men, the duties of their several stations and relations; in the regular government of all their appetites; in resisting and overcoming all the trials and temptations they meet with in this world: and all, in order to their improvement and advancement in every grace and virtue; that they may thus become *meet* for entering upon the enjoyments of a state of perfection, and *fit* for the reward and crown of Him that *overcomes*.

Upon the whole, then, it is abundantly evident, that the main design of the Gospel, and of our blessed Saviour's coming into the world and his death, is to recover men from sin and vice; and bring them back to that

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conformity to God in holiness and goodness, in which their true happiness lies : this is the great lesson we are taught, by *the grace of God*, that “ hath appeared bringing salvation to us ; that denying ungodliness and “ worldly lusts, we should *live* soberly, “ righteously and godly *in this present world*, “ looking for that blessed hope, &c.” *Tit.* ii. 11. 13. For this purpose, there are “ given to us exceeding great and precious “ promises, through the knowledge of him “ that hath called us to glory and virtue, “ that *by these* we might be *partakers of a* “ *Divine nature, having escaped* the corruption that is in the world through lust,” 2 *Pet.* i. 3, 4. And it is, withal, declared, that “ the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from “ heaven, with His mighty angels, in “ flaming fire, taking vengeance on them “ that know not God, and that *obey not the* “ *Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ*,” 2 *Thess.* i. 7, 8. So that, the great design of Christ, and His Gospel, is not *merely* to deliver sinners from *misery*, and bring them to *happiness* at last ; by no means, to deliver them only from the pains of sense, and bring them to a state of *sensual gratifications*, or any *enjoyment* consistent with vice ; but, to restore true piety and virtue to a degenerate world ; to bring men back to the true perfection of their nature ; and not only to the first beginnings of moral excellency, but to such

improvements as are necessary to their entrance on a state of pure bliss. Accordingly; not only, is a holy and good disposition of mind necessary to any beginnings of true happiness; but, as the heavenly bliss is founded in the perfection of holiness, to fit us for *that* not only the first beginnings of piety and goodness, but further improvements, by the course of a holy and good life, are, in the nature of the thing, necessary; and plainly declared to be so, throughout the tenor of the Gospel. A holy life is not a *task* laid upon us here, to entitle us to a reward hereafter; but, is a natural *progress* to our complete happiness, necessary to make us meet for it: and it can no more be a proper act of *mercy* in God to *dispense* with it, than to *dispense* with our happiness; for 'tis only so far as a man is *improved* in holiness, that he can either have *complacency* in God, or *God in him*.

But, lest it should be thought, that, notwithstanding all that has been said, such *improvements* in holiness as to fit a man for the heavenly bliss may be attained *all at once*, by such Divine aids as we are not forbid to expect; and so may *possibly* be attained by a sinner, even in his *last moments*: let us consider,

In the Second place; that the business of a Christian, and his preparation for the heavenly state, is, all along in Scripture, represented as a progressive work; only begun, in
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his first conversion; and to be gradually carried on, to its proper improvement and perfection, by the course of a holy and good life, and a faithful *striving against sin*.

I might even observe here; "that our state in this life being a state of trial and exercise, in order to our future reward and triumph, arises not meerly from our sinful imperfections; but from the condition of human nature, in its original frame and constitution." Even *Adam*, in his first creation, though he was made *innocent*; yet was not so *perfect* and *confirmed in goodness*, but that he still stood in need of further improvement: he was created with a faculty to judge aright; and with a power to govern his appetites, which he could controul far more easily than we can do now: yet he was not immutably good; but might, without due care and watchfulness, be induced to do evil; as we see he was: for an habituated, confirmed state of goodness was, even then, to have been acquired by watchfulness and exercise; whereby he might, in time, have become so stedfast, as not to be prevailed upon, by any temptation, to act contrary to his duty. Nay, (what may justly appear more strange and affecting) the great *Captain of our salvation* himself has gone before us to His glory, by a course of obedience and patience. As Christians, we are to be followers of Christ, and conformed to the

image of the Son of God: and this circumstance, with regard to Him, may well appear wonderful and striking; that, though His human nature was perfectly immaculate from the first; yet He entered not upon His glory, but through a course of trial. He was originally free from the least stain of irregular inclinations, or corrupt affections; and, from the very first, had in Him the unpoluted principle of all those amiable virtues, which afterwards discovered themselves in his life; by a gradual display of which, from his childhood, he *increased in favour with God and man*: through the course of His life, He *did no sin, neither was guile found in His lips*; He was *holy, harmless, undefiled, separated from sinners*; and could challenge His most inveterate enemies, *which of you convinceth me of sin*: he had, therefore, no sins to repent of, no bad inclinations to amend, no relicts of corruption to subdue: and yet, He did not enter upon that Reward and Glory to which, in his human nature, He is now advanced; but by passing through a *course of trial*; and, by the most exact and intire obedience unto death, even the death of the cross, giving the utmost proof of His consummate Piety and Goodness! And, is it to be expected, that any of His weak and imperfect followers should get to their reward *all at once*; without any trial or discipline, to train them up to it?

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This would be contrary to the whole tenor of Holy Scripture; which represents the state of a Christian, in this life, as a state of trial and exercise, discipline and improvement, in order to his advancement to a more perfect state: and the work of sanctification is, all along, set forth as a progressive work; from lesser beginnings, gradually carried on to its perfection: so that the place and use of the first repentance, is not to make a man *immediately fit* for heaven; far less, to conclude, and make up for, an ill-spent life, by a meer regret for having led such a life; but, to *begin* the course of a good life; whereby, through a gradual progress in holiness and goodness, he is to be trained up for a state of perfection.

In the several metaphors the Scripture makes use of, to set forth the work of grace; and the emblematical representations our blessed Saviour gives us of it; it is always represented as taking its rise from small beginnings; and, by a gradual progress, carried on to its perfection in glory. The foundation and propriety of these images and metaphors plainly lies here; that this is a thing in which the course of Nature and the conduct of Grace are harmonious, and bear a beautiful correspondence the one with the other; that the most perfect state of things is not produced *all at once*; but every thing has its *small beginnings*; and is from thence carried

carried on, by several steps and *degrees*, to its proper *perfection*. And, in applying such figures and metaphors, the natural and obvious meaning of them is carefully to be attended to; the purpose for which the similitude is plainly brought in; the meaning, without which there would be no propriety, or sense in the allusion; and especially the meaning in which they plainly concur; so as not only any one of them gives light to the others; but also one branch of the similitude gives light to the other, that which represents the Progress to that which expresses the first Beginning of the Christian life. To proceed to particulars:

The first entrance of true religion into the heart, is represented as a *New Birth*; and it's progress as a growth, or growing up: now, as a child new-born, though it has human life in it, yet is not fit for manly exercises and entertainments, but grows up to them by slow steps; in like manner, a Christian, newly converted, must grow up by degrees to those stronger exercises of piety and goodness, and that higher relish of virtuous enjoyments, for which he is *created in Christ Jesus unto good works*: and therefore the Apostle exhorts his new converts, 1 Pet. ii. 2, 3. "As new born babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby; if so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious." Again;
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the first *beginning* of the Christian life is represented under the emblem of a branch engrafted into a living stock; and it's *progress* under that of bringing forth fruit, and *much fruit*, Jo. xv. 1.—Again; the entrance on the Christian life is represented as *laying a foundation*; it's progress as *building* upon it: 1 Cor. iii. 9, &c. Eph. iv. 12, &c. and ii. 20, &c. Again; the Christian life is compared to *running in a race*, which is a constant and a quick motion forward, without stopping, going back, or turning aside; in which it is not enough to *start fair*, and run on a while; but one must run on, till he reaches the *Goal*, to obtain the prize: 1 Cor. ix. 24. Heb. xii. 1. Further; the state of a Christian in this life is represented as a *warfare*; and his perfect state is set forth under the emblems of a Victory and Triumph: Rev. ii. 7, 11, 17, 26. and iii. 5, 12, 21. now, in a *warfare*, it is not enough to *enter the lists*; nay, to *fight one battle*, or *gain one conquest*; but we must persist in the *contest*, till our *warfare is accomplished*; and, by a train of Victories, we have gained a compleat Triumph: thus, the Christian must *fight the good fight of faith*, if he would *lay hold of eternal life*, 1 Tim. vi. 12. and the Apostle says of himself, ii. 4, 7, 8. *I have fought the good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith; henceforth is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, &c.* Again;

gain; the progress of religion is set forth by the growing of corn; in which, says our blessed Saviour, *Mark iv. 28. The earth bringeth forth—first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear.* And, in fine, says the Wise Man; “the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day,” *Prov. iv. 18.*

If, now, we pass from the figurative to the plain descriptions of the life of a Christian; and the work that remains for him to do, after a good work is begun in him; they all point the same way. “Leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, says the apostle, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith towards God.” *Heb. vi. 1.* To believers the exhortation is, “As ye have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in Him; rooted and built up in Him.” *Col. ii. 6, 7.* and *Gal. ii. 20.* says the apostle, “I live by the faith of the Son of God.” ’Tis not to them who only begin to do well, but “to them who by patient continuance in well-doing seek for glory, honour and immortality,” that God will give eternal life, *Rom. ii. 7.* And, they who have begun the work of their salvation, and even given former proofs of their obedience to the gospel, must still work out their own salvation with fear

fear and trembling, Phil. ii. 12. *fearing*, as the apostle expresses it, Heb. iv. 1. "lest a promise being left us, of entering into His rest, any of us should seem to *come short* of it." To true Christians is both the threatening and the promise addressed, Rom. viii. 13. "If ye live after the flesh, ye shall die; but if ye, through the spirit, do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live:" agreeably to what the Lord says, by the prophet, Ezek. xxxiii. 18. "When the righteous man turneth from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, he shall even die thereby." * And, says our blessed Lord, to those Jews who believed on Him; Jo. viii. 31. "If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed, &c." and to his particular disciples, of whom He says, *As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you*, He adds, "continue ye in my love; if ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love." xv. 9, 10. And, says the apostle Peter, to them that had obtained like precious faith with the apostles, ii. 1. 5. — "giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, &c. — for if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ." Again:

* See also the 13th verse of that chapter.

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says the Apostle *Paul*, to those who had *believed* as the Apostles *preached*, “Be ye *stedfast* and *unmoveable*, *always abounding* in the work of the Lord; for as much as ye know that your labour is not in *vain* in the Lord.” 1 Cor. xv. 11, 58. In fine, the Apostle *Peter*, enjoins *growth in grace*, not only as a proper *improvement* of what Christians had attained unto; but as necessary to prevent their *falling from their steadfastness* in religion, ii. 3. 17, 18.

And, what is thus said, in general, with respect to the obligations on Christians to constancy and advancement in their Christian course, in order to their Eternal Salvation; is particularly applied to the several Graces and Virtues of a Christian Life, which are *all imperfect* at first. *The saints and faithful brethren in Christ* must “walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing; being fruitful in every good work, and *increasing in the knowledge of God*.” Col. i. 2, 10. They who *have received Christ Jesus the Lord*, must be *stablished in the faith*; and *abound therein*. Col. ii. 7. our love must *abound yet more and more, in knowledge and in all judgment*: Phil. i. 9. we must *increase and abound in love one towards another, and to all men*: 1 Thess. iii. 12. our *patience must have its perfect work*: Ja. i. 4. and we must *abound to every good work*: 2 Cor. ix. 8.

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This improvement of Christians is represented as the *great End* of *all* the assistances, afforded to us by the Gospel; *all* the ordinances and appointments of our blessed Lord and Saviour. The Ministry and Ministers of the Gospel are appointed, not merely for the *conversion* of Sinners; but *chiefly* for the *improvement* of Saints: *Eph. iv. 11.*—"He gave some apostles—and some pastors and teachers; for the *perfecting* of the Saints—for the *edifying* of the body of Christ; till we all come—unto a *perfect man*, &c. that we be no more *children*, &c. —but—may *grow up* unto Him in *all* things who is the Head, even Christ."

All this may be confirmed by the examples of those, who have trod the paths of *virtue* and *glory* before us. *To which*, indeed, *of the Saints* shall the careless sinner *turn*; (who thinks to mount to Heaven *at once*, in the end of a vicious life;) who will not, from their own experience, confute his folly? Are not all the examples recorded in Scripture for our imitation, of such as, not only *through faith*, but through *patience*, continuance, perseverance, and improvement, have come to *inherit the promises*? and the *use* we are to make of such examples is plainly pointed out, *Heb. vi. 11, 12.* "that every one of us do shew the *same diligence*, to the full assurance of hope *unto the end*; that we be not *slothful*, but fol-

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“lowers of them, who, &c.” I shall single out but One example: but it is such a *one*, as may stir up all of us, who have any thing of the Divine Life in us, to *work out our own Salvation with fear and trembling*: it is the example of the great Apostle Paul. He was, before his conversion to Christianity, *concerning the righteousness that is in the law, blameless*: He was, then, zealous for what He believed to be the Truth; though His zeal was irregular, and ill-governed: yet, notwithstanding all the prejudices of His education, and against all the force of His misguided zeal, He became a Convert to Christianity; and entered upon it, from the very first, as a state of *suffering* in this world: *Acts ix. 16.* He declares, that *for this cause* He obtained mercy, that in him first “Jesus Christ might shew forth *all long suffering*, for a pattern to those which should afterwards believe on Him to life everlasting;” *1 Tim i. 16.* a glorious and encouraging pattern of *all long-suffering*, as to what was *past*! but let us see what *followed* after; and, if we would have His Case a pattern for our *encouragement*, let us set His Practice before us as a pattern of our *duty*: what ardor of love and gratitude to our merciful God and gracious Redeemer, what fervor of charity, did He discover! and *all mingled* with the most sensible regret, for the errors of his *past* life; which he can never speak of but with the deepest self-abase-

abasement, and the most profound admiration of the freedom and greatness of Divine Grace to such a one as He had been: how diligent and indefatigable was He, in the service of God and the blessed Redeemer; and in doing good to men, and promoting their greatest happiness, in the most disinterested manner? and after he had gone on, in such an indefatigable *course of good works*, for about twenty-five years *, what does He say of Himself? *Phil. iii. 12—15.* “Not
 “as though I had already attained, either
 “were *already perfect*; but I *follow after*,
 “&c.—I count not myself to have apprehended; but this *one thing* I do; *forgetting those things which are behind*, and
 “*reaching forth* unto those things which are
 “*before*, I *press towards the mark* for the
 “prize of the high calling of God in Christ
 “Jesus.”

So striking an instance I shall leave the application of to every Christian's own thoughts, without any descanting upon it.

And thus, I think, I have shown with the strongest Evidence, “that the business
 “of a Christian, and his preparation for
 “the Heavenly State, is all along in Scripture represented as a *progressive* work;
 “only *begun* in his first conversion; and

* It was, probably, so long after His first conversion, before He wrote the Epistle to the Philippians.

“ to be further improved, and carried on
 “ by degrees to its proper *perfection*, by
 “ the course of a holy and good life; in
 “ order to his entering on the Heavenly
 “ *bliss*.”

But, lest it should be thought, that all this *may* admit of *some* exceptions; and still there *may* be *some* room left to hope, that a work of Grace may be not only *really begun*, but considerably *improved*, in the Sinner's last moments, whereby he may be, *even then*, made fit for Heaven, by such extraordinary measures of Divine Grace as God *can* easily grant, and has no where forbid us to expect: I shall now proceed to what, I hope, will be allowed still *more decisive* upon this head.

And, not to insist upon it, how unwarrantable all expectations of such extraordinary and *miraculous* Divine aids are, unless we had an *express revelation* from God to build such expectations upon; and that they, of all men, can have the least warrant for such expectations, who improve them to encourage their going on presumptuously in a vicious course: I say further, in the

Third place: that the Promises of future Happiness are, throughout the tenor of Holy Scripture, made to a Holy and good life; without the least hint of the *alternative*, that a man repents at last his having neglected it: and the threatnings of future punishment,

nishment, to the *workers of iniquity*, as they are most positive and peremptory, so are made without the least reserve or exception; particularly, without the exception of a man's *bitterly regretting* at last that he had been so. So that, by these Promises and Threatnings, it is plainly and expressly declared, "that the *future states* of all men "shall be determined at last according to "their *works*, in the *course* of this life; and "not according to any *extraordinary change*, "contrary to it, wrought in them in their "last moments:" and, by the tenor of these Threatnings, *all hopes* of those *extraordinary aids*, which are acknowledged necessary to the producing such a change, are as plainly precluded and *forbidden* by God, as if the thing was declared *absolutely impossible*.

We shall consider these Promises and Threatnings together: and indeed, they are, for the most part, so joined together in Holy Writ, that they will hardly admit of a *separate consideration*; and so as they throw mutual light and force upon one another.

Whether we consider the Old Testament, or the New; the words of *Moses* and the Prophets, or of our blessed Saviour and his Apostles; they all concur in representing to us a Holy and good life as the *only way* to future happiness. And, tho' the Revelation of the Old Testament gives

but obscure and imperfect hints of that *life and immortality*, which is brought to light by the Gospel; yet it seems to afford strong enough assurances, that *no hopes* of it can be entertained, but in the way of a Holy life here; and only in *this way* are those great and good men in ancient times, who seem to have had the expectation of it, represented as entertaining any hope of it. The worthys, in these old times, who obtained a good report through Faith, obtained it by an *Active Faith*; which animated them to a steady and unreserved obedience to God, in the most difficult and trying cases: by this Faith *Abraham*, the father of the faithful, upon *God's call*, “obeyed, and went forth, not knowing whither he went;” contented with this, that he well-knew *whose Call he followed*: “for he looked for a city that hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God: *Heb. xi. 8, 10.* By this Faith *Moses*—chose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; for he had respect unto the recompence of reward.” And let us advert to the characters given of those who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord, abide in his tabernacle, and dwell in his Holy place; *Pf. xv. and xxiv. 3.*—And, *Pf. xxxvii. 37, 38.* “Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright; for the end of that
“man

man is peace : but the transgressors shall be destroyed together, the end of the wicked shall be cut off." And, lxxviii. 26, 21. when it is said, *our God is the God of salvation*, it is added, "but God shall wound the head of his enemies, and the hairy scalp of such a one as goeth on still in his trespasses." And, says the Psalmist of himself, cxix. 166: "Lord, I have hoped for thy salvation, and done thy commandments : and 174. I have longed for thy salvation, O Lord, and thy law is my delight." And says the Lord to the Prophet, *Isa. iii. 10, 11.* "say ye to the righteous, that it shall be well with him; for they shall eat the fruit of their doings : wo unto the wicked, it shall be ill with him ; for the reward of his hands shall be given him."

In the New Testament, as we have the most clear and full discovery of life and immortality, brought to light by the Gospel ; so, the wrath of God is more clearly and expressly revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, Mat. xvi. 27. Our blessed Lord tells us expressly, that when he shall come in the glory of his Father, with his holy Angels ; " then he shall reward every man according to his works." And Jo. v. 28, 29. He warns his hearers, that " the hour is coming, in which all that are in the graves shall hear His voice, and shall

" come

“ come forth, they that have *done good* unto
 “ the *resurrection of life*, and they that have
 “ *done evil* unto the *resurrection of damna-*
 “ *tion.*” When the Apostle *Peter* was well-
 taught, by an heavenly vision ; he says, “ of
 “ a truth I perceive that God is no *respector*
 “ of persons ; but in every nation he that
 “ feareth God and *worketh righteousness* is
 “ accepted with Him.” And the like sen-
 timent He expresses, when he says, in his
 1st *Epist.* i. 17. that the Father, “ without
 “ *respect of persons*, judgeth according to
 “ *every man’s work* ;” and therefore, they
 who call on him must “ pass the time of their
 “ *sojourning here in fear.*” And, the Apostle
Paul expressly declares, *Rom.* ii. 6.—that
 God will at last “ render to every man ac-
 “ cording to *his deeds*: to them who, by
 “ *patient continuance in well-doing*, seek for
 “ glory, honour, and immortality, eternal
 “ life ; but unto them that are contentious,
 “ and do not obey the truth,—indignation
 “ and wrath—upon every soul of man that
 “ *doth evil* ;—but glory, honour, and peace
 “ to every man that *worketh good*, &c.” Nor
 is this distribution of things according to the
 tenor of any antiquated, or abrogated, law ;
 but this equitable retribution shall be made
 “ in the day when God shall judge the se-
 “ crets of men by Jesus Christ,” according
 to the Gospel which the Apostle preached,
 v. 16: and all upon the same principle,
 which

which both Apostles, in a perfect harmony and concurrence, found upon the moral character of God; "for there is *no respect of persons* with God," v. 11: He has no regard to the outward appearances and circumstances of men; nor to any considerations foreign to their *real*, their *moral*, characters: and therefore as, on the one hand, we can hardly conceive of Him as too *indulgent* a Father, in his readiness to receive into favour sinners who truly repent and amend; so, on the other hand, we can scarce conceive of Him as too impartial and *inexorable* a judge, in his dealings with such as go on *all their life* in a sinful course; and will not, by all the methods of His mercy in time, be reclaimed and reformed. Again, the Apostle warns us, 2 Cor. v. 10. that "we must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ, that *every one* may receive the things *done in his body*, according to that he *hath done*, whether it be *good* or *bad*:" sure, no change wrought on a man in his *last moments*, can be reckoned among things that he *hath done in the body*. I pass over several other texts, to the same purpose; some of which I have already mentioned upon a former head*: and shall proceed to take particular notice of a remarkable passage, or two. One is that of the Apostle, Gal. vi. 7, 8. where He lays down

* See p. 34, 35.

the great rule of the Divine conduct ; that order of things, under His government, which is elsewhere expressed by his *rendering to every man according to his works ; or giving him the fruit of his doings* : a rule founded upon the moral Character of God ; for, says *Elihu, Job xxxiv, 10, 11*, “ hearken unto me, “ ye men of understanding ; far be it from “ God that He should do wickedness, and “ from the Almighty that He should *commit* “ *iniquity* ; for the *work* of a man shall He “ *render* unto him, and cause every man to “ *find according to his ways*.” It is true ; the Apostle is here particularly recommending and enforcing the duty of beneficence and liberality ; but to me it appears as plain, that he is applying and adapting to this purpose a general principle, equally applicable to the enforcement of every branch of good and virtuous practice. This principle He expresses, in terms of allusion to what is observed in the ordinary course of Nature, “ that men *reap in harvest* the very same “ kind of grain that they *sow in the seed-* “ *time* :” a thing the Reverse of which is Possible ; but so contrary to the ordinary course of nature, and the common experience and observation of mankind (attentive enough to these *outward* things, and sagacious enough to make just observations about them) that no man entertains the least expectation that it *ever will happen* : and
would

would men apply the same attention and sagacity to their *most important concerns*; they might see it as unreasonable, and contrary to nature, to expect to find it otherwise in their spiritual affairs; to think to *reap* at last, and in the other world, any thing else than the proper and natural *fruit of their own ways*: for, the time of *this life* is our *seed-time*, in order to our *reaping* the harvest in *another life*. This serves to obviate the last refuge, to which they who go on in a sinful course in hopes of retrieving all by a late repentance, are apt to betake themselves, when beat out of all others; that *the thing is possible*: but, they might as well hope, after sowing *tares* in the Spring to reap *wheat* in the Harvest; for *that is possible* too. The Apostle ushers in His awful warning, with a particular caution against a dangerous deceit or delusion: *be not deceived*; “deceive not
 “yourself, nor suffer any others to impose
 “upon you, in a matter of so great impor-
 “tance to you.” He adds *God is not mocked*: men attempt to *mock* God, when they think to *impose* upon Him by fair shews and specious pretences; when the Laws and Rules of His government are *despised*; or men think they are to be *dispensed with*: but this is a *vain attempt*: God *cannot be imposed upon*; and every attempt to do it must recoil upon their own heads who make it: nor will he *pass from* the rules of His government, or
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the sanctions of His laws; in favour of those obstinate wretches, who *trample* upon them. The Apostle goes on; “ for, whatsoever a “ man *soweth* that shall he also *reap* :” this is his general assertion; that it holds as well in the *spiritual* sense as in the *natural*, that men reap in the same kind as they sow: this He further explains and amplifies; for *he that soweth to his flesh*, “ who employs his labours “ and his earthly possessions to the gratifying “ of his selfish and sensual appetites,” *shall of the flesh reap corruption*; of such a corrupt improvement of his time and talents, he shall receive future misery, as the proper *fruit of his own ways*; in like manner, as what one *reaps in harvest* is the *natural fruit* of what he *sows in spring*: *corruption*, in opposition to *life everlasting*; i. e. the punishments of the other world: for, that the Apostle is here speaking of that *reaping*, those retributions, that shall be made at the great day of judgment, and in the other world, is further clear from the other part of His declaration; *but he that soweth to the spirit*; “ he who, under the influences and “ conduct of *the spirit of love*, employs his “ time, his endeavours, and the advantages “ he is entrusted with, to the improvement “ of his *better part*, and his *Usefulness* in this “ world;” *he shall of the spirit reap life everlasting*; “ under the conduct of the Divine “ Spirit, and as the *fruit* of such spiritual “ employ-

“ employments and improvements, he shall
 “ come to eternal happiness at last ”

Let me repeat it ; that here the similitude is plainly taken from a thing, the *reverse* of which is *possible* with Almighty God ; but so contrary to the course of Nature, that no man expects it, any more than if it was *impossible*. Let us put the case, that a man sows tares in his field : it is *possible*, with Almighty God, that he shall reap the finest wheat : but did ever any man, of a sound mind, entertain such an expectation ? how absurd would it appear, for any one to think, by the most *bitter regret* and hearty *repentance*, to *retrieve* such a bad sowing, and reap the quite contrary grain ; unless, in time, he plucked up the tares, and sowed the grain he wished to reap ? as absurd is it, according to the Apostle's comparison and awful warning, for the sinner to expect, by the most hearty regret and deepest sorrow, out of time, to *escape* the misery a vicious course has exposed him to ; when he has no opportunity to *undo* what he has been *doing* all his life, and betake himself to a better course. In the Natural sense, no man, from a *meer possibility* of the thing, ever expects to reap another kind of grain than he sows ; even though God has no where declared, that it *shall not be* ; as he has plainly declared, that *they who sow to the flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption*, in opposition to *life everlasting* ;

ing; by which all the vain hopes the sinner can pretend to raise from the *meer possibility* of its being otherwise, are utterly overthrown: *be not deceived; God is not mocked.*

To conclude this head: the representation which our blessed Saviour (to whom *the Father hath committed all judgment*) gives us of His procedure at the great Day of Judgment, *Matt. xxv. 31*—is full, clear, and strong, to the same purpose: then the great Judge of the world will make a distribution of men, and a different assignment of everlasting rewards or punishments to them, according to their moral characters, discovered in their *works* and the course of their *lives here*; will receive men to Happiness, or condemn them to Misery, not only as they have done good or done evil, but as they have *done* good or *neglected* to do it: let us carefully advert to this; that not only they who have employed their lives in doing *wicked* actions; but they who have *neglected* to employ them *usefully*, in doing good, beneficent, and charitable actions, as they had opportunity; are, in that great decisive Day, condemned to *everlasting punishment*. And, however they, against whom that charge is laid, are represented as attempting to *disown* it; they are not represented as *allowing* the *fact*, but yet thinking to *evade* the *sentence*, by pleading that, before they died, they most heartily regreted the neglect, and
fled

fled to the blood of Christ for pardon : *that appears too thin a plea*, for any to be supposed to dare to offer, in that awful Day, and before that dreadful Tribunal : indeed, *if we walk in the light, as God is in the light*, we may be assured that *the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin* : but to make that most precious blood a Sanctuary and Refuge at last, for those who, all the time of their life, have refused when God called, will, according to the whole strain of Scripture-revelation, be found, in that awful Day, a counting the blood of the Covenant wherewith we are sanctified an unholy thing, and making Christ the minister of sin : then, the righteous only shall go into life eternal : and who are the righteous, our blessed Saviour plainly declares in that context ; namely, “ they who, in the course of their lives, “ have done good and charitable actions, “ as they had opportunity ; ” the beloved Disciple of our Lord plainly tells us, with a tender caution against suffering ourselves to be deceived by other representations of the matter ; 1 Jo. iii. 7, 10. “ Little children, “ let no man deceive You : he that doth righteousness is righteous, even as He is righteous ” (an expression far from denoting an equality ; but only signifying, that his righteousness stands upon the like proof and evidence with the righteousness of Christ, or of God) and, on the other hand, “ who-

“ soever doth not righteousness is not of God.”

Thus I have shewn, with the clearest evidence, that the promises of *future happiness*, in Scripture, run in the tenor of its being the *fruit*, and the final reward of a holy and good life; and there is no Promise, in the whole Word of God, that runs in any strain like this, “ that they shall inherit eternal life, who either live a holy life here, or heartily Repent at last that they have neglected it:” I have also clearly shewn, that the threatnings of future misery, against the *workers of iniquity*, as they are most dreadful and terrible; so they are most positive and peremptory, without any reserve or exception. Many, in pronouncing the awful and righteous Sentence of God, denouncing future misery to the workers of iniquity, seem to think it a *necessary* piece of *caution* to add (not, “ unless they repent in time and amend,” but) *unless they repent at last*: but the Word of God knows no such reserve, or *exception*; but constantly, without it, declares, that going on in a sinful course to the last leads to *unavoidable ruin*.

And, further to cut off *all* pretence of such exception: let it be observed, in the

Fourth place: That God expressly and peremptorily threatens, He will give a deaf ear to *their* cries *at last*, or in the day of *their*

their distress and extremity, who refuse to hearken to His Calls in time: and, so far as a mere sorrow for an ill-spent life may be called Repentance; it is plainly intimated in Scripture, that there may be a real Repentance, a hearty Sorrow and Regret, too late; when the *time* for amendment and recovery is *past*.

There are plain intimations in Scripture, of such a thing as a sinner's *day of grace*; his season or opportunity for making his peace with God, and for securing and *working out his own Salvation*; which if he sins, or trifles away, the Door of mercy is shut upon him; and he has no access to retrieve the ruin he has brought upon himself: and no one sinner knows, how long this *day of grace* may last with him; or how near it may be to an end; if he refuses to comply with the *present Call* of God to *Repent and Believe the Gospel*: for this is certain, that *all the Calls and exhortations in the Word of God, to Repent and to Believe in Christ, are to do so immediately, and leave no encouragement to defer it one moment.*

“ Every one that is godly, says the Psalmist, shall pray unto thee *in a time when thou mayest be found*:” and, in like manner, the prophet exhorts sinners, *Is. lv. 6,* “ Seek ye the Lord (*viz.* by true repentance and amendment, as appears from the next verse) *while He may be found*;—plainly im-

plying, that there is *a time* when He will not be found: He has his *day of grace* and mercy; but He has his *day of wrath* too: and they who “despise the riches of His goodness, and forbearance, and long-suffering, not being led thereby to repentance; do thus treasure up to themselves wrath against the *day of wrath*, and revelation of the righteous judgment of God.” *Rom. ii. 4, 5.* And the Apostle, *describing* those to whom he writes, that they “receive not the grace of God in vain;” says “behold *now* is the *accepted time*, behold *now* is the *day of Salvation.*” *2 Cor. vi. 1, 2.* And “the Holy Spirit saith, *to-day* if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts.” *Pf. xcv. 7. Heb. iii. 7, 8.* and the Apostle adds, *v. 13.* “Exhort one another daily, *while it is called to-day*, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.” For the neglect of this their *opportunity*, our compassionate Redeemer wept over Jerusalem; “saying, if thou hadst known, even thou, at least in *this thy day*, the things which belong to thy peace! but *now* they are hid from thine eyes.” *Luk. xix. 41, 42.* For this, the *foolish virgins*, in the Parable (*Matt. xxv. 1.*) could not enter in to the marriage-feast; because they had neglected to improve their *time and opportunity*: they had neglected to make provision of *oil*, of inward graces and virtues, to keep the lamps.

lamps of their profession *alive*: and while they went, too late, to make provision (here they are represented not only as *regreting* the neglect, but attempting to *make it up*) the *door was shut*, and they were absolutely refused entrance. The Apostle, exhorting the Jewish Christians, *Heb. xii. 15. 17.* to “look diligently lest any should fail of the “*grace of God*,” sets forth the danger of letting our *opportunity* slip, under the *example* of *Esau*, “who, for one morsel of meat sold “his birth-right;” how inconsiderable a thing this; in comparison of foregoing the Heavenly birth-right, and Heavenly inheritance, for the gratifications of the sensual appetites, or of covetous or ambitious desires! And, He adds, “ye know how that “*afterwards*, when he would have inherited “the blessing, he was rejected; for he found “*no place of Repentance*, though he sought it “*carefully with tears*.” And, the awful denunciation of the Divine Wisdom, against obstinate sinners, *Prov. i. 24. 31.* is in very strong and dreadful terms: “because I have “called, and ye refused—I also will *laugh* “at your *calamity*, and will *mock* when your “*fear cometh*:—then shall they *call* upon “me, but I *will not answer*; they shall *seek* “me *early*, but they shall not find me:— “they shall eat of the *fruit of their own* “*way*.” And, if to any sinner this appears too *hard and severe*; he may be addressed in the
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the words of *Bilgah* to *Job*, xiii. 4. *Shall the earth be forsaken for thee? and shall the rock be removed out of its place?* “ Shall the wise
 “ course of Providence, and the sacred laws
 “ of the Divine government, be overturned?
 “ in favour of so guilty, so worthless, a
 “ wretch!” Sure, no truly pious and good
 soul can think such awful and salutary denunciations and warnings too hard and severe; nor think it an *unrighteous thing* with God to execute them, against those who will not be reclaimed by them; as he knows, and finds in his comfortable experience, that *Christ's yoke is easy and his burden light*, and that *God's commandments are not grievous*; and desires to be made *happy in no other way*, than the *way of Holiness*.

But, because some may pretend that the *threatnings* of future punishment to those who go on all their life in a vicious course, *must* admit of some reserve or exception; seeing there are *Promises* in the Gospel that run in a contrary strain; or, at least, must be considered as implying an exception to such threatnings: therefore, I undertake to prove; in the

Fifth place: that, there is no *one* promise, in the *whole word of God*, which gives the least countenance or encouragement to the hopes of those who go on in a sinful course, in the expectation of retrieving all at last, by a death-bed sorrow, and flying to the
 mercy

mercy of God in Christ Jesus in their last moments.

Here, it is natural to expect, the promises of salvation made to Repentance and Faith in Christ, will be alleged, in opposition to what I have laid down; as there are no other promises that can, with any shadow of reason, be adduced to that purpose: *these*, indeed, the sinner, blinded by his lusts, is apt to understand as implying, "that *one* act of sorrow or regret for an ill-spent life, at any time, even in the very *close* of it (falsely called Repentance) and *one* act of confident and presumptuous reliance on the mercy of God and the merits of Christ *than* (falsely called Faith in Christ) will retrieve all the ruin he has brought upon himself; and effectually recommend him to the mercy of God unto eternal life."

Thus, foolish and deluded souls *wrest the Scriptures to their own perdition*: and most basely and disingenuously improve groundless apprehensions of the Divine mercy and goodness, to harden them in vice, and encourage them to go on securely in a sinful course; in the hopes of setting all to rights at last, by a late regret and dying sorrow; especially, if it is very *deep* and strong, as they flatter themselves it will be.

But, that these Promises will admit of *no such* construction; will be abundantly evident

dent from the following Considerations, seriously attended to.

i. That there are very good, and sufficiently Obvious, Reasons, why the promises of Salvation should be made to Faith and Repentance; without derogating in the least from the absolute Necessity of a Holy Life, to fit us for the Happiness of Heaven. Not to repeat what I have formerly said *, concerning the Terms of salvation declared and required in the Gospel: what I have *now* asserted will be abundantly evident; whether we consider the Calls to Repentance and Faith, and the encouraging Promises, enforcing them, as they are first addressed to the heathen world; or, as they are extended to *all* sinners. The Promises of salvation to the Heathens, on their first abandoning their Idolatry and Vices, and receiving Christ as their Saviour and Lord; do *immediately* import, that they should be delivered from the darkness and misery of heathenish ignorance, superstition and idolatry, and brought into the privileges of the Christian Church; made partakers of all those advantages, for eternal Happiness, which the discoveries and institutions of the Gospel afford; and, by improving these, in the course of a holy and virtuous Life, should actually come to this eternal Happiness *at last*. But, as these Exhortations and Promises are still ex-

* See pag. 23. &c.

tended to *all* sinners, who hear the Gospel; and it is the Declared design of Christ's coming into the world, *Jo*, iii. 16. "that *whoever* believeth in him should not perish, " &c." For understanding the perfect consistency of this, with the absolute necessity of a Holy Life, in order to the happiness of Heaven; let it be observed; that God, who directly sees into the hearts of men, chiefly regards the Heart, in His service: true Holiness chiefly lies in the purity of the Heart and the inward Affections of the Soul; which are the governing principles of our conduct: that which constitutes an Act, or Course, of true Obedience to God, is the inward good Principles from which it proceeds: and it is the prevalency of inward good dispositions of Heart, that lay the *foundation* of true happiness and enjoyment *within*. Therefore, it is most proper and natural, that the Promises of God, His Promises of Happiness, be made to those inward dispositions and affections, which are the true Principles of Holiness and Obedience to Him; rather, than to *any outward* Actions. If, then, true Faith in Christ is an effectual Principle of a truly virtuous Obedience; and true Repentance is the real and effectual Beginning of a holy and good Life; well may the Promises of that salvation and happiness, to the obtaining of which a Holy life is absolutely necessary, be made to *these*; with-

without, in the least, derogating from, or lessening, the necessity of Holiness: for these promises are not made to *them*, considered as *single Acts*; but, agreeably to their Nature, as effectual Principles of *all* those Dispositions, and that Course of behaviour, which is requisite to render us Meet for the Heavenly bliss: so that, *whatever*, in the nature of things and according to the tenor of the Gospel, is necessary to salvation, is either *included* in *them*, or naturally *flows* from *them* as the genuine and effectual Principles of it. Now, this is really the case: true Faith *purifies the Heart*, Acts xv. 9. the source of our Actions, *out of which are the issues of life*; *purifies* it from *all* sensual passions and *worldly lusts*, all narrow and selfish affections; and raises it to a Heavenly and Generous disposition; to that supreme Love to God, and hearty Good-will to all men, which are the natural principles of a regular performance of all the duties of Piety and Devotion, Equity and Goodness: thus, *Faith worketh by Love*, Gal. v. 6. the most commanding affection of the soul: it conveys into the Heart such a strong and lively sense of the Glory and the Goodness of God; of the Excellency of the Redeemer, and His condescending Kindness; as promotes in the soul the highest Love and Gratitude to our Gracious God, and Compassionate Saviour; with the sincerest Goodwill to our neighbours, in

imitation of that Divine Love by which we are saved : and thus leads us to the regular performance of every duty, from a principle of Love. Thus, true Faith renders the soul as a *good Tree* ; which naturally *bringeth forth good Fruit* : it lodges a *good Treasure* in the *Heart* ; from whence the *good man bringeth forth good things*. True Repentance (as it mainly consists in Amendment, and is constant and *not to be repented of*) is the proper and real Beginning of that *patient continuance in well-doing*, which leads to *glory, honour and immortality*. So that ; if we consider the *obvious reasons*, why the Promises of salvation are made to Faith and Repentance ; we may evidently see, that there is nothing in these promises, inconsistent with the plainest declarations concerning the *absolute necessity* of a Holy Life to the Happiness of Heaven : for justly may the promises of that Salvation, to which a Holy Life is absolutely necessary, be made to such Dispositions as are the real Beginnings and effectual Principles of such a Life. Therefore,

2dly : These Promises can, by no means, imply ; that the *first Acts* of Repentance and Faith render a man *immediately meet for Heaven*, come when they will ; even when they come early enough, to have the *best influence* upon us : for, it is by the Temper we improve in, by their *after-influence*, that we become meet to partake

of the Heavenly Bliss. As Repentance and Faith in Jesus Christ, are comprehensive and leading principles in true Religion and Christianity; sometimes these two are joined together in Scripture, as comprehensive of *a'l* that is required in order to our salvation; but by no means exclusive of a holy life, of which they are the Principles and beginnings: so, in the Preaching of our blessed Lord, *Mar. i. 15.* so also in the Preaching of the Apostle Paul, *Acts xx. 21.* Nay, sometimes *all* that is required to our Salvation, is comprehended under *one* of these: as, Repentance, *Ezek. xviii. 36.* Faith in Christ, *Acts xvi. 31.* But such passages are, by no means, to be understood, as if the *first act* of Repentance, or Faith, rendered a man *immediately* meet for the Heavenly bliss; or secured his *immediate entrance* into it: they can only imply (according to the tenor of the Gospel) his being assured of *coming to Heaven at last*; and of having the Time and opportunity, as well as the advantages and Assistances, necessary for *working out his own salvation*; which is *only begun by the first Acts* even of the most sincere Repentance and the most unfeigned Faith. That which seems to occasion the Error of many in this matter, is their having no notion of *being saved*, but *going directly to Heaven*; without any just notion, at the same time, *what Heaven is*, or *what Improvements are necessary to make*

us capable of so exalted a Happiness. Heaven is not so much a different *place* from that where we now are, as a Different *State* from the present; and it is by the *temper of our minds* we must make our *approaches* to it: nor is it even a *state* so quite different, but that there are the *beginnings* of it, going on and advancing upon Earth, in every true Heir of it; in his improvements in Love to God, and in a kind and equitable disposition towards all around him, to fit him for a state *wherein dwells righteousness*, and where *perfect Love* reigns. *Salvation* must be *begun*, and advancing *here*, to be *perfected hereafter*. To be *saved*, is to be *delivered* from pernicious Errors and delusions, fatal Mistakes concerning our happiness, and from vicious and corrupt affections; to have our minds more and more enlightened in the knowledge of the most important Truths, and formed to a Relish of true Enjoyment; to have our Hearts more and more purified from *all* irregular passions and vicious inclinations; and improved in Love to God and Divine things, and in Brotherly love and Charity: this *salvation* is not *perfected at once*; but from small *beginnings*, in the first dawns of Divine Light and Love into the Soul, is *gradually* carried on and *improved*, to its Perfection in the Heavenly state. Now; if the Promises of Salvation, made to Repentance and Faith, do, by no means, imply

that the *first acts* of these render a man *immediately* meet for Heaven, or secure his *immediate entrance* into it; even when they come *early*, and the most ready compliance is given with the Divine Call *; far less, when they come *late*, in the *close* of a bad life; after the sinner has presumptuously, or carelessly, refused to comply with *many* repeated Calls of God; and thus is hardened in vicious *habits*, grown to an exorbitant pitch, and not to be *easily* or *speedily* conquered and subdued. Sure, no one can imagine any greater Excellency, or Efficacy, in a *late*, than in an *early* Repentance and Faith: on the contrary; an *early* and ready compliance with the Call of the Gospel, may naturally be supposed to carry a man further towards Heaven, than a *late* and reluctant one. Now; it is certainly one thing, to say, to a man in Life, "Repent and Believe" in Christ *now*; and you shall be saved; "and shall come to Heaven *at last*, by a "Life of Holiness:" and quite *another* thing to say, "if you Repent and Believe *at any* "time, however late, you shall be saved, "and go to Heaven *directly*, even without "a Life of Holiness." I say, *now*; and to a man in Life: for, let it be carefully attended to, in the

3d place: That, as all the Calls of the Gospel to Repent and Believe, are to do so

* See above, pag. 25, 26.

now, without any delay; and the encouraging Promises of Salvation enforcing them, are only made to a *present compliance*: so, these Calls and Promises are *always* addressed to *men in Life*; and never once, in the whole tenor of Scripture, to *dying* men. This may, at first view, be greatly surprising to many: but the Fact is certain; that there is no *one* instance, in the whole Scripture, of such addresses as these, “ Repent, and turn
 “ from all your transgressions, and so iniquity shall not be your ruin;” or “ Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved;” ever being directed to a person on a *death-bed*, or in visible danger of death: but these Calls and promises are *always* addressed to persons *in Life*, and likely to continue for some time in life; and who may, therefore, have time and opportunity, to carry on and improve the *good work*, begun by their *ready* compliance. We read of *one* person, indeed, (*Acts* xvi. 31.) to whom the great Call of the Gospel, enforced by the great Promise of it, was successfully addressed; who, a *little before* that, had been in immediate danger of dying, by his own hand too: but that *danger* was *quite over*, before this address was made to him; nay, before he conceived, or expressed, any concern about the matter. Now, this observation I am upon might *alone*, methinks, go a great way towards being *decisive* in the whole

Argument now under consideration. If the Call of the Gospel to Repent and Believe, with the promises of salvation to the *Penitent* and Believers, were ever, in Scripture, addressed to *dying* men; they might be reckoned to imply, *in these instances*, a Promise that, by some extraordinary and miraculous Grace, *they* should be made immediately meet for Heaven, and have an immediate entrance into it: and yet, *these* instances could not be drawn into a *precedent*, without a plain Divine warrant for it: but, as these Calls and Encouragements are constantly, and *only*, directed to men *in life*; the most that they can imply is, an assurance, upon a present compliance, of their coming to Heaven *at last*; and, consequently, of their having the time and opportunity, as well as the means and assistances, necessary for *working out* that *salvation* they thus enter upon. If *such* persons *readily* comply with the Divine Call; they may have a *probable* view of *time* to finish the good work begun, from the state of their health: a stronger assurance of it, from the goodness and consistency of the Divine conduct; whose very calling of men to *enter upon* a work, which in its nature is a *work of time*, implies that, upon their ready compliance, He will *give* them *time* for it: an *absolute* assurance, from the Promise of Salvation itself; which must include a promise of whatever is necessary, for carrying on,

on, and completing it. All this, it is plain, cannot afford the least encouragement to any sinner, to hope to get to Heaven, by any Repentance, or Faith he *can have*, at the close of a bad life; when he *can have no* opportunity to *work out* that *salvation*, which is *only begun*, even by the most sincere and the most early Repentance and Faith. And let us take this along with us; in the

4th place: That the Repentance and Faith, to which the promises of Salvation are made, are plainly described, in Scripture, to be such, as *actually* and in fact are the real beginnings of a holy and good life: so that, no Faith and Repentance which any sinner *can have* at the close of a bad life, *can* come up to these descriptions. If we advert to a variety of passages, concerning that Repentance and Faith to which the promises of Salvation are made; I may say, *all* the passages where their nature and influence is any way explained or described; we shall find them described to be such, as not only *would* produce a Holy life, if there was opportunity for it; but *actually do* produce it: and the reason may be obvious; because the necessary meetness and preparation for the enjoyments of a state of perfection, does not arise from what a man *would do*, in obedience to God and Christ, if he had opportunity; but from what he *actually does*; not from those improvements he *would* attain to, but from what

what he *actually* attains this way. Particularly ; that Repentance, to which the promises of Pardon and Salvation are made, is never described as consisting in *meer Sorrow* for sin, however deep or bitter ; nor is Sorrow so much as declared to belong to it, *for itself* ; but rather *preparatory* to it, and requisite as subservient to the further purpose, of the Reformation and amendment of heart and life, in which true Repentance lies : remarkable, to this purpose, is that passage of the Apostle, 2 Cor. vii. 9—11. “ Now I
 “ rejoice, not that ye were *made* sorry, but
 “ that ye *sorrowed unto Repentance*, — for
 “ *godly sorrow worketh Repentance, &c.*”
 therefore, Sorrow itself is not Repentance ; but, even when it is most sincere, is only introductory to it ; and Repentance itself lies in that amendment, which a truly *godly sorrow works*. Another man’s grief and inward pain can, of itself, be no pleasure to a good and generous heart : and can *that* of itself, be acceptable to God, which can be no pleasure to any good man ? surely, God, who desires our happiness, can have no pleasure in our pain or grief ; but only so far as it is necessary, and of influence, to make us truly better. The occasion of the mistake of many, concerning this matter, seems to be this : in the common acceptation of the word, a man is said to *repent* of that which he is *grieved* for having done ; though that
 grief

grief has no further effect: but, with whatever propriety this may be called *repenting* in common speech (though no man would believe, that one is heartily sorry he had wronged him, if he goes on to injure him still; and does not, in his after-conduct, do him good offices, if he can :) however, such a *fruitless sorrow* is not Repentance, in a Religious sense; not that Repentance which the Gospel requires, and to which it promises pardon and salvation; which, in all the descriptions of it, is declared to have its finishing and proof in actual Reformation and Amendment; and to be such as actually produces *newness of life*. I might adduce numerous passages of Scripture to this purpose: but these plain ones may suffice. Says the Lord, by the Prophet, *Isa. i. 16*. “Wash
 “ye, make you clean, put away the evil of
 “your doings—*cease to do evil, learn to do*
well, &c. and *lviii. 5—7*. “Is this the fast
 “that I have chosen? a day for a man to
 “*afflict his soul*, &c. is not this the fast that
 “I have chosen? to *loose the bands of wick-*
edness, &c. is it not, to *deal thy bread to*
the hungry,” &c. Again, *Ezek. xviii. 27*.
 true Repentance is thus described; “When
 “the wicked man *turneth away* from his
 “wickedness that he hath committed, and
 “*doth that which is lawful and right*, he
 “shall save his soul alive:” and, agreeably
 to this decision, the exhortation is, verses

30, 31. "Repent and *turn from all your*
 "transgressions; so iniquity shall not be
 "your ruin: *cast away from you all your*
 "transgressions—and make you, *a new heart*
 "and *a new spirit*, for why will ye die?"
 In like manner, xxxiii. 14, 15. "If the
 "wicked *turn from his sin*, and *do that*
 "which is lawful and right" if he "walk
 "in the statutes of life, without committing
 "iniquity; he shall surely live, he shall not
 "die." And, in the following context,
 God puts the equity of His procedure upon
 this footing; in opposition to those who said,
 the way of the Lord is not equal. When John
 the Baptist, our Lord's fore-runner, preach-
 ed Repentance, for the forgiveness of sins,
 this was his exhortation, Matt. iii. 8, 10.
 "Bring forth fruits meet for Repentance:
 "—every tree that bringeth not forth good
 "fruit is hewn down, and cast into the
 "fire:" which the Apostle, Acts xxvi. 20.
 expresses without a figure, when he says,
 that he "shewed first unto them at Damas-
 "cus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all
 "the coasts of Judea, and then to the Gen-
 "tiles, that they should Repent, and turn
 "to God, and *do works meet for Repent-*
 "ance." And Eph. iv. 22—24. He thus
 describes true Repentance; "That ye put
 "off, concerning the former conversation,
 "the old man, which is corrupt according
 "to the deceitful lusts: and be renewed in
 "the

“ the spirit of your mind : and that ye put
 “ on the New man, which after God is
 “ created in righteousness and true holi-
 “ ness.”

In like manner ; that Faith in Christ, to which the promises of Salvation are made, is not a *meer assent* to any doctrines ; nor a *confident* reliance on the mercy of God or the merits of Christ, without *complying* with the *terms* of the divine mercy in Christ Jesus : but, is such a receiving of Christ for our Saviour and Lord, as subjects the soul to His government ; gives Him the rule in the heart ; and leads on obedience to His laws, in the course of the life : it is described to be such a faith, as *purifies the heart*, and *worketh by love* ; as I have already shewn* : it is the principle of a Holy and Divine life. Gal. ii. 20. “ *I live*, says the “ Apostle, by the Faith of the Son of God :” and Heb. x. 38. “ The just shall live by “ Faith :” and 2 Cor. v. 7. we *walk* by Faith.” Our blessed Saviour’s gracious invitation, Matt. xi. 28, 29. is, “ Come un- “ to me all ye that labour and are heavy la- “ den, and I will give you rest ; *take my “ yoke upon you and learn of me*, for I am “ meek, and lowly in heart, and ye shall “ find rest unto your souls.” And Jo. xv. 1—5. He represents it as the genuine proof of our being engrafted in Him, as the true

* See pag. 60.

Vine, by a true and lively Faith; that we *bring forth much fruit*; *i. e.* do much good.

Now; if that Repentance and Faith in Christ, to which the promises of Salvation are made, are plainly described to be such as *actually* are the real *beginnings* of a Holy and good life; can such descriptions possibly agree to *any* Repentance and Faith a dying sinner *can* have in the *close* of a bad life? whose Repentance, *perhaps*, amounts to no more than a cold, or, at most, a warm and passionate, *God have mercy upon me*; at best, is a *meer* fruitless sorrow and regret; tho', perhaps, rendered more passionate, by his present strong terror, and *fearful looking for of judgment*: whose Faith, like that of *Devils*, is a *meer* assent to Divine truths with *trembling*; or, perhaps, so *cold* an assent as not even to be attended with trembling; or such a confident reliance on the *mercy* of God, or *merits* of Christ, as may more justly be called *presumption*! In fine; in the

5th place: When once men, by sincere Repentance and unfeigned Faith, are engaged in a Christian course; the constant strain of the exhortations of the Apostles to them is not only to *persevere*, but to *improve* in Holiness. The calls to Repent and Believe are constantly addressed, in the Gospel, to those who were not yet converted to Christianity, nor had taken on the Christian Profession: but to Christians, the exhortations

tions run perpetually on *walking in newness of life*, and *working out their own salvation*: the *Epistles* to Christians, who had already Repented and Believed, are full of the most pressing Exhortations to all virtue, and positive improvement in every thing praiseworthy; and constantly inculcate the indispensable necessity of a Holy and good Life: not, to Believe in Christ; but to *walk in Him*, as they had received Him: not, to Repent; but to make *progress* in Holiness, and go on to *perfection*: not only, to be *steadfast and unmoveable*; but *always abounding in the work of the Lord*; as knowing that, in this way and course, their labour is not in vain in the Lord.

Put all that has been said upon this Head together: and it will be abundantly evident; “ that there is no *one* Promise, in the whole
“ word of God, that gives the least encouragement to the hopes of those who go on
“ in a sinful course to the close of their
“ lives: and that the Promises of Salvation
“ made to Repentance and Faith in Christ,
“ afford no manner of *exception* to this Assertion; nor do, in the least, derogate
“ from the Absolute Necessity of a Holy
“ Life to the Happiness of Heaven.” It is, certainly, *one* thing to say, to men *in life*,
“ Repent *now*, and turn to God through
“ Jesus Christ; and He will afford you both
“ opportunity and Grace to work out your

H

“ Salva-

“ Salvation; and, by a course of Holiness,
 “ you shall come to Heaven at last:” and
 quite *another* thing to say, to a *dying* Sinner,
 “ Repent and Believe in Christ, and you
 “ shall go *directly* to Heaven;” or, to say to
 any man, “ if you Repent and Believe at
 “ *any time*, it shall avail to your Salvation;
 “ even tho’ it be so late, that you have *no*
 “ *opportunity* to *work out* that Salvation,
 “ which the true Christian only enters upon
 “ by the *first acts* of the most sincere Faith
 “ and Repentance.” Neither of the two
 last can I find said in the whole Gospel.

But, perhaps it may be asked here;
 “ what, then, if a sincere Penitent and Be-
 “ liever *dies immediately*? shall he not go
 “ to Heaven? or, shall any be Damned,
 “ who sincerely Repent and Believe on
 “ Christ?” But, it is plain there can be
 nothing straitening in this supposed Diffi-
 culty; if there is no ground to reckon that
 the *Case supposed* ever happens in *fact*: which
 there is not: on the contrary; there is good
 ground, from the Different, but perfectly
 Consistent, parts of the tenor of the Gos-
 pel, to be satisfied, that it *never does happen*.
 On the *one* hand; salvation is promised to
 all who truly Repent and Believe in Christ:
 on the *other* hand; a Holy Life is plainly
 declared to be absolutely necessary, and is in
 the nature of the thing necessary, to make
 us meet for the Heavenly bliss: therefore,

we

we may clearly conclude ; that *all* who Repent and Believe unto Salvation, do it so early ; that, by the care of Divine Providence, they have opportunity afforded them for improving and carrying forward the *good work* thus begun ; nor are any, according to the declared tenor and Design of the Gospel, saved another way. And, it is only on this footing, that the truth of the common saying can be maintained ; that, *true Repentance is never too late* ; namely, because it is *always early* : from whence it plainly follows ; that, *late Repentance is, not only seldom, but never true.*

But, still it may be alleged ; that though there are no Promises of Salvation, to the late Repentance of one who goes on in a sinful course to the last ; nor that are contrary to the necessity of a Holy Life in order to the Happiness of Heaven ; yet there are *Instances* to the Contrary : or, at least, there is *One Instance*, of a sinner accepted at last, and admitted to the Happiness of Heaven, upon a Repentance in his *dying moments* ; who had *all his life*, till then, gone on in a vicious and profligate course : and what *has* been, *may be* again. In opposition to this allegation, I undertake to make good ; in the

Sixth place : “ That there is *no one Instance*, recorded in Scripture, of that Repentance being accepted of God, or avail-

“ ing to an entrance into the Heavenly
 “ bliss, which was deferred to the last ; or,
 “ had its beginning only in the close of a
 “ bad Life.”

To many, I am sensible, it will appear a very great Paradox, to assert ; that there is not one Instance, to be depended upon, of any man's being accepted of God, or received into the happiness of Heaven, upon a Repentance deferred to *the last*. According to the common opinion, and in the judgment men make in Charity (as they reckon) concerning persons, when they are dead, who have gone on all their life in a vicious course, there are *a great many* such Instances : and were the accounts we have oft times delivered to us, with the Conclusions drawn from them, to be depended upon ; we might be induced to think, that the Heavenly mansions were hardly more filled with any sett of men, than with those abandoned wretches who, after going on all their lives in a loose and flagitious course, are at last brought, by their flagrant crimes, to a violent and ignominious death ! that the Heavenly City was greatly made up of such, as are unfit for, and unworthy of, any Society upon Earth ! But, it is not traditionary Instances, which we, or others, may form, by our good opinions or hopes, that we are to be ruled by, or take encouragement from ; but only Scriptural instances, which have the warrant of
 Divine

Divine Authority to support them. I would not be rash or forward, to check or restrain our having as good opinions and hopes concerning our neighbours, when they are gone, as we can entertain, in a consistency with the plain declarations of God's Word and Gospel: but I must observe, that the main Use of the exercise of our Charity, in entertaining a good Opinion of our neighbours, is towards those with whom we *live* and converse; and as for the Dead, with whom we are to have no further intercourse, there is no Necessity of our passing any Judgment concerning them at all; so that, if we cannot, agreeably to the Rules and Denunciations of Scripture, pronounce favourably concerning them, we may let them alone, and leave them to the Judgment of God: and, being too forward to express good hopes concerning *them*, oft times proves very pernicious to the *living*; by hardening them in their evil ways; and hindering one of the best and most necessary offices of Charity towards them, our using the most faithful endeavours to rescue them out of the most dangerous snare.

Now, this assertion, "that there is no instance, in Scripture, of a sinner admitted to Heaven, upon a Repentance not begun till his last moments;" being a *Negative*, it is properly incumbent upon those who maintain the contrary to bring forth

their instances, and to support them; and the Negative admits of no other proof, than by examining any Instances that may be ad-
duced, and showing that they are not to the purpose for which they are brought: if this be clearly done, the point undertaken must be reckoned sufficiently proved.

There is but *one* Instance, that can be pretended to be brought from Scripture, “of a
“ sinner saved at last, and upon a Repent-
“ ance never begun ’till his dying mo-
“ ments.” For, whatever may be alleged from the Passage in *Mat. xx. 1. - 16.* that pas-
sage is plainly a Parable, and is *not* related as *matter of fact*: a Parable, concerning which it is far from being certain, that it refers to the calling of *particular persons*, to Repentance, at different periods of their lives; but it, more probably, relates to the Calling of the Gentiles into the Church of God, in the latter age of the world; and of several nations, in different periods of time, to equal privileges and advantages with the Jews, the ancient people of God: and, even supposing it did relate to the Calling of particular persons, at different times of their lives, to the service of God; it gives encouragement only to those, who comply with the *first Call* given them: and, with this *one* observation, borrowed from an excellent writer upon this Argument, I may dismiss the consideration of this Parable: that, even
I taken

taken in the view last-mentioned, it is so far from giving the least encouragement to a *late* and long deferred Repentance; that it shows nothing more strongly, than the necessity of obeying the *first* call of God to Repent, and of diligence in *the service* of God throughout the whole remainder of life afterwards: the Persons latest called are chid, indeed, for *standing all the day idle*; but not in the *vineyard*, the Church; but in the *market-place*, which represents the state of those who are without the Church and not yet called by the Gospel; for they are represented as having it to plead, that *no man* had *hired* them; but *immediately* upon being called they *comply*, and are no more idle, but diligent in the service of the vineyard: the Parable represents *none* as refusing to go into the vineyard, when they were hired, or neglecting to labour in it afterwards; and at last *rewarded*, merely for their *sorrow* at night for the wilful neglects of the whole day: and, therefore, affords not the least encouragement for the vain imagination, that the *late sorrow* (falsely called Repentance) of a Professed Christian, who has been an habitual sinner throughout the whole course of his life, will avail to his being an object of the favour of God, and an heir of Heaven, at last.

The *only instance*, then, that can be pretended to be brought from Scripture, of a person,

person, who had all his life gone on in a vicious course, being saved at last, and upon a Repentance not begun till his last moments, is that of *the penitent Thief*, who was crucified with our Blessed Saviour: so that, if this is plainly shown to be *no instance* of that nature, the careless and secure sinner must be deprived of the *only resource* he may hitherto have imagined remained to him, in the whole Word of God, to encourage his deferring his Repentance to the last, and yet entertaining hopes of Mercy and Salvation.

For my own part, I must frankly declare; that when, laying aside prejudices, I carefully and impartially consider that whole narrative, as it stands in the Gospels, I can see so little shadow of foundation for understanding it as an account of an “habitual” sinner accepted and saved, upon a Repentance never begun till his last moments;” that it has often been matter of wonder to me, how such a view of it has ever been first taken up; and not only greedily swallowed by the careless sinner, in order to the soothing of himself in his vain hopes; but also allowed, by some, who have shown the most earnest concern to guard against such a pernicious abuse of it.

It must be owned, that, even allowing that we had here *one* instance of an habitual sinner accepted at last, upon a Repentance in his dying moments, who *then* complied
with

with the *first call* to repent ; there is a vast difference betwixt such a case, and the case of a Repentance deliberately and presumptuously *deferred* till then : and still there remains enough to be said, and has been justly urged by those worthy Divines who have made that concession, to shew the unspeakable danger of *any other* sinner's taking encouragement from this *singular instance*, or thinking to draw it into a *precedent*. But these things I shall not repeat ; as to me there appears no occasion for them.

For I cannot help thinking, that whoever, without prejudice, impartially considers this Narrative, *as it stands*, will find *no one circumstance* in it, that gives the least foundation to take it for an account of the *first repentance* of an hitherto hardened sinner : and this must, in reason, be reckoned sufficient, to shew, that we have here before us *no such instance* as is alledged : it is not to be expected, nor is it necessary, that we should bring a *direct proof* of the *negative*, “ that this person had *not* been, in the former course of his life, an habitual sinner ; “ or, that the account we have here is *not* of “ the first beginning of his repentance : ” for, if the account here given does not at all, far less plainly and expressly, so represent the matter ; it is evident, that we have here *no scriptural instance* “ of an habitual sinner “ saved at last, upon such a late Repent-
“ *ance*.”

"ance." Had it been intended to give us
 here one instance of this sort; it had been
 natural to have related the history in some
 such manner as this, that "this man had
 " been a person of a loose and abandoned
 " character, and had led a vicious life, till
 " by his crimes he was brought to a violent
 " and ignominious death; that he continu-
 " ed hardened in sin to his last moments;
 " and then, without any other Repentance
 " than rebuking his fellow-sufferer for his
 " insolence, acknowledging the justice of his
 " sentence, and the innocency of our Sa-
 " viour (for no other are here mentioned)
 " said to Jesus, *Lord, remember me when thou*
 " *comest into thy kingdom.*" but it is plain
 the fact is *not so related*: nor is there any
 thing in the whole account before us, to lead
 us to think that this was the fact. Pray let
 us take a plain view of the whole *narrative*,
 as it may be fairly represented in *other* words,
 than these to which the tyranny of custom
 has affixed so strange a construction: it
 stands thus: "among other circumstances
 " of ignominy, which our blessed Lord sub-
 " mitted to and endured, when, for our
 " sakes, *He humbled Himself to the Death of*
 " *the Cross*, this was one; that *He was num-*
 " *bred with the transgressors*; and even dis-
 " tinguished by superior disgrace, being cru-
 " cified betwixt two thieves: the *one* of
 " these was so hardened a sinner, that, a-
 " midst

“ midst the pain and ignominy he himself
 “ so justly endured, and in the nearest view
 “ of death, he joined with the rude multi-
 “ tude and their *leaders* in reviling our blef-
 “ sed Saviour: the *other*, upon this inso-
 “ solence, in a warm and serious manner,
 “ gave him a just and reasonable rebuke;
 “ acknowledging their own guilt and the
 “ justice of their sufferings, and declaring
 “ the perfect innocency of Jesus; then,
 “ turning to our Saviour, acknowledged
 “ Him as *Lord*, and humbly begged to be
 “ kindly *remembered* by Him, when he should
 “ *come to the possession of that Kingdom to*
 “ *which He owned His title: upon which,*
 “ our blessed Lord graciously assured him,
 “ that he should that *day* be with Him in
 “ *Paradise.*”

Now, what is there, in all this Narrative,
 to lead us to conclude, that this person had
 been an *habitual sinner* in the former course
 of his life, before he committed that crime
 for which he was condemned; or that, since
 his committing it, he had *never repented till*
now? It is not, sure, his giving so just a
rebuke to his *fellow-sufferer*, for his insolent
 impiety! nor his giving such an honest *tes-*
timony to the perfect *innocency* of our Saviour!
 nor his making such an honourable *acknow-*
ledgment of Him, in the very view of all the
 ignominy of His cross; and making such
 an humble *petition* to Him! none of these,

it

it is hoped, will be reckoned among the proper symptoms and marks of an hitherto *hardened offender*: is it, then, that he acknowledges the justice of his sentence; and owns that he, and his fellow-criminal, in suffering as they now did, *received the due reward of their deeds*? But, is such an acknowledgement, in reality, a certain mark of a sinner hitherto hardened in vice, and who had never relented till that moment? He is, indeed, said to have been a Thief; and to have been guilty of an instance of Theft, by his own acknowledgement, deserving the *gallows* (to speak in our stile): but, he may have been guilty of *no more* than *one* instance of that sort, for any thing that is said of him: will, now, *one* instance of crime deserving a violent death prove a man to have been, in the former course of his life, an habitual sinner; and never to have repented, till he is actually brought to his execution? Need I rake into the ashes of the dead, and bring upon the field the names of *eminent Saints*, who are set before us as Patterns with regard to the main of their conduct; who, yet, were so far left of God (for *their own* tryal and humiliation, and for *our* warning) as to be guilty of *particular instances* of crimes much worse, and of a more complicated nature, than any thing that appears, in the *scripture-narrative*, to be laid to the charge of this poor man?

Such

Such instances are sufficiently known ; and are to be remembered as awful warnings, *let him that standeth take heed lest he fall.*

But it may be alledged, that the Evangelists (*Matt.* xxvii. 44. and *Mar.* xv. 32.) represent this man as joining, at first, with his fellow criminal, in reviling our blessed Lord ; though afterwards, it would seem, he relented : and will not this be owned to be a mark of a *hardened sinner* ? this, indeed, would look very bad, was it *p'ain* that the expressions of the Evangelists were to be so understood : but this is far from being the case. It is an obvious and just rule, for understanding the passages of the Gospel-history recorded by the Evangelists ; “ that, when
“ two, or three, of them relate the same
“ story, but *one* more particularly and distinctly than the others ; the full account
“ of it is to be taken from that Evangelist
“ who relates it the most particularly and
“ distinctly.” Now the very same story, which the two Evangelists mention in *one* sentence (*Matthew* saying, “ The thieves
“ also, who were crucified with him, cast
“ the same in his teeth ;” and *Mark*, “ They that were crucified with him reviled
“ him ;”) *Luke* xxiii. 39. relates more particularly and distinctly thus ; “ *One* of the
“ malefactors—railed on Him, &c.—but
“ *the other* rebuked him, &c.” Nor do the general expressions in *Matthew* and *Mark*,

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oblige

oblige us to think, that the *intire fact* was any other, than as *Luke* distinctly represents it : for it does not appear to be their design to set forth the *number*, but the *character*, of the persons who thus insulted our Saviour, amidst his last sufferings ; that he was basely insulted by persons of *all* characters, not excepting even such as were crucified with Him, and suffered justly while He suffered innocently, *one* of whom likewise upbraided Him, but was justly reprov'd by the *other*, as the Evangelist *Luke* particularly relates. And it is observed to be no unusual thing, in the stile of the Evangelist *Matthew*, whom *Mark*, for the most part, follows and abridges, that when two persons are joined together, and *one* of them speaks as in the name of both, what *he* says is said to be spoken by these persons ; as we sometimes express it, “ they spoke so *among them*.”

So that, from a fair and impartial view of this whole Narrative,

1. It does, by no means, plainly appear that this Penitent had ever been an *habitual* sinner, for any considerable time, in the former course of his life : there is not one bad thing said of him, in *all* the account we have in *Scripture* concerning him, but that he was guilty of an act of Theft, which, by his own confession, deserved a Capital punishment : and he may have been guilty but of *one* act of that kind, for any thing that is said, or insinu-

insinuated of him, to the contrary; though, speaking of himself and his fellow-criminal together, he says, " they received the reward " of *their deeds*;" expressions which it is most natural to understand of the particular crimes for which each of them were condemned: this alone cannot be reckoned enough to prove, that he had been an habitual sinner in his former life: he might, for all that, have been an *early* Saint, and a very good man in the main; and have led a very good life in his former days, for the most part: he may, for any thing we are told, have been surprized, through weakness, or tempted by want, to the crime he committed; and have met with his just condemnation for the first, and the *only* instance of it he had been guilty of.

2. Even though it plainly appeared, that he had been an habitual sinner in his former life; and had run into the Capital crime for which he was condemned, as the result of a preceding loose and abandoned course; yet we have no ground given us to determine, that the application he here makes to our blessed Lord was the *first beginning* of his Repentance; but may, as well, suppose, that he had begun it long before; so as, by this time, to have arrived at a great height of piety and goodness: it may, for any thing we are told, have been a long time since he was guilty of the crime, before he suffered

for it; during *all* which time, he may have been going on in a course of sincere Repentance and thorough Amendment: and, if it *may* be so, for any thing we are *here* told; then it is plain, we have no ground *here* given us to reckon it was otherways; and what *other* ground can we have for it? if the *Scripture* neither says nor hints, either, that this man had been an habitual sinner in his former life; nor, that this was the first of his Repentance; then, it is plain, we have here no *Scripture-instance* given us “ of a person, who had gone on all his life in a sinful course, saved at last upon a *late* Repentance:” and, if we will take the liberty to *supply*, or add to, any passage of *Scripture*, from our own fancies, or traditional prejudices; we may easily, that way, *wrest, to our own destruction*, any passages of *Scripture* whatsoever, even the plainest and most *easy to be understood*. But, tho’ this might suffice to the purpose I am upon; and tho’ adducing a *direct proof* of a *Negative* is a task no man can be fairly obliged to undertake; and, in most cases, impossible to be performed; yet, in the case before us, we may further observe,

3. That, even in this short narrative here given us of the character of this Penitent, and of his behaviour in his last moments, there are not wanting some *positive marks* of such a strength of virtue, as it is not natural

to expect in a New Convert, who had been, till that moment, a hardened sinner: so that, not only have we *no* hint here given us, from which we might justly conclude, that he *had* been such a one; but we have some *positive* evidences, from which we may, at least with great probability, conclude the contrary. It has been often said, “ that he *now* embraced “ *the first opportunity* of acknowledging Jesus “ as the *true Messiah*.” I see no evidence of this fact: but, if he did so, it was no more than *holy Simeon* had done before him; and his doing it, in the manner he did, when that *Messiah* was in so *low* a condition too, is enough to show, that he was far from being a *Novice* in Religion; but had attained a high pitch of freedom from those Vices and prejudices which oppose the Light. We can observe nothing, in the whole of his behaviour, like the *contrition*, sorrow or fears, of a man *conscious* to himself that, hitherto, he had been going on in a sinful course; and pierced with the *conviction* that, to this moment, he was in a most dangerous state; but, rather, like the *confidence* of an *improved saint*, of a man conscious to himself that he was in a good state, had been early converted, and had brought forth *fruits meet for Repentance* long ago: here’s no *coming trembling*, with the *aylor*, and asking, *what shall I do to be saved*; no down-cast looks, with the *Publican*, who *not* daring to *lift up his*

eyes to Heaven, smote on his Breast, and cried *God be merciful to me a sinner*: but, instead of all this, such a confident, tho' humble and honourable, application to Christ as this, *Lord, remember me, when thou comest into thy Kingdom!* And, in this honourable acknowledgment, and humble application to our blessed Redeemer, amidst the lowest circumstances of the ignominy of His Cross, he discovers such an uncommon strength of Faith, and of *Virtue* and Courage added to that Faith, as it is by no means natural to suppose, a man who had hitherto been hardened in sin and impenitency would arrive at, *all at once*: he not only Believes in Jesus, but has the courage to make an Open Declaration of his Faith in Him, as Lord and King; of a kingdom *not of this World*; in which he should reckon it his happiness to be *remembered*, even *after his death*: and all this he does not only when he could have no manner of external encouragement to it; but also while *all* outward circumstances, and the temper and behaviour of all about him, tended strongly to discourage him from it: our blessed Saviour was *now* lifted up upon a Cross; distinguished by ignominy and disgrace; delivered up to the rage and contempt of the people; mocked by the Gentiles, and despised by the Jews; *one* of his own Disciples had basely *betrayed* Him; *another*, whom He had highly favoured, had, with

with a strange mixture of Cowardice before men and Boldness with the name of God, shamefully *denied* Him (a crime far worse, and of a more complicated nature, than any this Penitent is charged with :) *all* the rest had *forsaken* him and fled : when our Saviour is thus brought to these lowest circumstances of abasement ; *this man*, amidst all the indignities thrown upon Him, openly acknowledges Him as Lord and King of the *invisible World* : in all which he discovers a strength of Faith, Love, and Heavenliness of mind ; not to be found, in the present circumstances of our blessed Lord, even in any of those Disciples who had been *long with Him* ! and, as a learned Divine observes, “ this poor “ man seems *now* to have engrossed *all* Profession of the Faith, and to have made up “ the *whole* visible Church by himself ! ” Is this like a man hitherto hardened in wickedness ; and who had never begun to relent, ’till this moment ? But,

Enough has been said, and perhaps more than enough, to shew “ that we have here “ *no* instance given us, of a person saved at “ last, upon a Repentance begun in his “ dying moments, who had gone on all his “ life in a sinful course.” And, if the careless and secure sinner is thus deprived of the *only* instance he could pretend to bring, from the whole word of God, to support his hopes of obtaining Mercy at last, upon a late Repentance,

pentance, or dying regret for a *whole Life* spent in sin; let him no longer flatter himself with such *vain hopes*; but speedily fly from the wrath to come, by an immediate compliance with the Call of the Gospel.

And now, methinks, I have abundantly proved, that, as there is no *one* Promise, so there is no *one* Instance, in the whole Word of God, of any Exception to the plain and peremptory Declarations in the Gospel, of the Absolute Necessity of a *Holy Life* to the Happiness of Heaven; and that this Necessity is *without any reserve or exception*. I add, in further Confirmation of all this, if it can yet be thought to need any; in the

Seventh, and last, place; That the *Conduct* of our blessed Saviour, and His Apostles, in *Calling sinners to Repentance*, is perfectly agreeable to this Plan: and is absolutely *unaccountable* upon the supposition, that there is any room left, by the Tenor of the Gospel, for a sinner's being saved at last, upon a Repentance and Faith not begun 'till a Dying hour. I mean not, now, to speak of the *Doctrine* of our blessed Saviour and His Apostles concerning this matter; of which I have fully spoken, under the preceding Heads: but of something, in the *Conduct* of their Ministry, which is very remarkable to the purpose I am upon.

Our blessed Lord came not to call the *righteous*, indeed, but *sinners*; but then, He came

came to call them to *Repentance*: and most diligent and indefatigable He was, in this His great work: but, how did he go about it? Why, by delivering His most important Instructions, Warnings, and Exhortations, to multitudes who flocked about Him, to attend upon His Ministry; and *always* to persons in Life; who might begin their Repentance, and enter upon a Religious course, in the reasonable hopes of making progress in it, and *bringing forth fruits meet for Repentance*. But, in *all* the pretty full accounts we have of His Personal Ministry, we never read of His dealing, for this purpose, with any persons on a Death-bed, or in their Last moments: nor so much as *one* instance that He, *who went about doing good*, ever visited any person upon a sick-bed, but to perform a Miraculous Cure; for which purpose too, He sometimes deferred coming, till the person was Dead. And, the like may be said of the Ministry of His Apostles; and particularly, of that great Apostle, *who laboured more abundantly than they all*.

This conduct must, certainly, appear very strange to many; as most inconsistent with their common prejudices: and, upon the principles of those, who think that a Death-bed Repentance is ever of avail to Salvation, it is absolutely Unaccountable. Had this been the Judgment of our blessed Saviour, *who was in the Bosom of the Father*, and to whom

whom *all things* were *delivered* of His Father; had it been the Principle of His Apostles, who had the Spirit given them *to lead them into all truth*; that Love and Compassion to immortal Souls, which, in *them* was so pure and fervent, must have prompted them with a double Ardour and Zeal, to lay hold of the Last opportunity of rescuing these precious Souls from Perdition, and bringing them back to God and to Happiness; an opportunity, too, that might seem attended with special advantages, while their convictions of sin were deep, and their fears of danger strong? What could hinder the *compassionate Physician* from pouring in the *balm* of the Promises and Consolations of the Gospel into such *wounded Souls*? What could hinder the *Good Shepherd* from attempting the *recovery* of such *strayed Sheep*? but the knowledge that it was, then, *labour in vain*! Nay, one may be apt to think, that even a conviction of its being to *no purpose*, would scarce be a sufficient restraint upon the compassion of a humane Heart; was not such fruitless tenderness towards the *dying* also judged of pernicious influence upon the *living*.

For my own part, the more I think upon this Circumstance, in the Conduct of our blessed Saviour and His Apostles, of the more Weight it appears to me in the present Argument. And,

If

If we lay all that has been said upon it together; methinks nothing is wanting to the fullest and most Abundant Evidence of this Important Principle; "That a Holy Life is *absolutely* Necessary to the Happiness of Heaven; nor are any saved in *any other way than the way of Holiness.*"

From hence a conclusion might naturally be drawn in honour of Christianity; which has such a direct and powerful tendency to restore the Image of God in Man; to bring men back to the true Perfection of their Nature; to produce the Joys of Conscious Virtue and Integrity, and promote the Peace and Welfare of Human Society. But, this argument, of the Excellency and Divinity of our Holy Religion, is already fully treated by the most Excellent Pens.

UPON the whole of what has been said; how justly may we take up a Lamentation over the sad state and face of Religion in our day! alas! how grossly have many Professors of Religion degenerated from the Spirit of True Religion and Original Christianity; and substituted in its place, a sort of Religion and Christianity of their own making; which has no influence to mend their Hearts, to correct their Passions, or better their Lives? How many satisfy themselves with a meer Profession of Religion; kept up by a customary attendance upon Ordinances of Worship;

ship; or, perhaps, a flaming Zeal for their own particular Way, or Party? a Zeal, so far from being a *Zeal of good Works*; that it is rather of the kind the Apostle speaks of, (*Ja. iii. 16.*) as the parent of *confusion and every evil work*. There are many a'll whose Religion lies in talking about Religion; and even talking about things that have little, or nothing, to do with *real Religion*; in doubtful *disputations*, and *vain janglings*. Others please themselves with a Fanciful and Enthusiastical Religion; which, having no Influence to better their hearts and lives, can have no natural, or accountable Influence on their Happiness: *all* their Religion lies in *Extraordinary Manifestations of God*; not arising from an attention to the discoveries He has given of Himself in His Works and by His Word; but conveyed into the mind (as they imagine, or pretend) in a more Immediate way: in Enthusiastick Raptures and unintelligible Transports; whereby they are sometimes sunk into Despondency, they know not for what reason; at other times raised to strong Hopes and Confidence, they know not on what grounds: they attain to an Assurance of their Salvation; not flowing from comparing their *Characters and Lives* with the marks of an Heir of Heaven, plainly laid down in Scripture; but, either from *immediate Revelation*, as they fancy; or, a strong and presumptuous trust and

Confidence in Christ, and what He has done; though they never *receive* Him, so as to *take* His *yoke* upon them and *learn* of Him. And, all the while, these *rapturous impressions*, and uncommon attainments, however *extraordinary* in their *nature*, have not so much as an *ordinary* influence to mend their hearts and lives: on the contrary, they swell their Pride; puff them up into a vain conceit of themselves, as distinguished Favourites of Heaven; a Confidence of the extraordinary Goodness of their Condition; and a supercilious Contempt of much better Christians, as below their notice or fellowship; like those of old, who said, *Stand by thyself, come not near me, for I am holier than thou*. Yea, nothing is more common with these Enthusiasts, exalted to such extraordinary attainments, than to condemn the Duties of *Social-life*, as *below* their concern, and no way conducive to the *working out* of their *Salvation*; which *some* of them will tell you, “is wrought out already to their
 “hand; or will be wrought out, of course,
 “without their giving themselves any trouble about the matter, if they but Believe
 “and trust strongly:” they Decry the Duties of Social Life, under the name of *Morality*; as if *that* was a name to be used in contempt! while the perfection of Moral Excellency is the great Glory of God Himself; and a conformity to Him in it is the

greatest Dignity of our Nature, and the very thing which it is the great design of the Mediation of Christ to bring us back to ! How many, in place of that true *Faith* which *worketh by Love*, have substituted a sort of Faith which consists in a meer speculative Belief, or, perhaps, a regard to a meer *form of words*, without knowing the meaning of them ; or a presumptuous and vain Confidence ; a Faith, which has *no* influence on their Hearts and lives ; which *worketh not at all*, unless it be *as a Charm* ! How many, in place of that *Repentance from dead works*, which is the beginning of a Holy and good life, a Repentance *not to be repented of*, but shewing itself in bringing forth *fruits meet for repentance* ; have substituted a *fruitless* *Regret*, which works *no* Amendment at all ; and which they even consider as a thing Indifferent *what time* it comes, provided it be before they expire, even at the close and conclusion of a whole life spent in sin ! This, this, is One main cause, why many *deal* in the matters of Religion *with a slack hand*. And, indeed, when men once come to look upon Religion as a thing quite *abstract* from the *conduct of life*, and having *no natural* influence to improve us and make us meet for true happiness ; but only *some how* made necessary to the happiness of the *other world* ; if they imagine it a thing only *necessary* against they *come to die*, and for securing the

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Happinefs of a *Future life*; but *no way* belonging to the Conduct or Comfort of *this life*, or our gradual Improvement in a Religion for the best Enjoyments; no wonder they put off *all* concern about it to *that time*, against which *alone* they apprehend it to be necessary. O that God, who alone can effectually reach the Hearts of all men, would awaken deluded sinners out of this thoughtless security; and rescue them from such a dangerous snare!

Of a piece with the rest of the gross practical Errors of many concerning Religion, is the Use they make of the Ministrations of those who are the Ministers of it. How many never knew any Use of a Minister of the Gospel *all* their days; but that he should mount his Pulpit at the stated times, and perform the usual Exercises there; and they should gather about him, and give their suit and presence; but without attending to any thing he says, either in Praying or Preaching, or minding it as of any great Importance to them? they had *no use* for his Assistance *all* their Life, to Instruct them, or excite them to their Duty, to Correct their mistakes, or direct them to Amend their faults; or, in a word, to do them any *real* service. But—is a New-born Child *weak*? does *mercy* (ever to be preferred to *sacrifice*) forbid bringing it to the Publick? why, *then* a Minister must be got, in all haste, to

perform a certain Ceremony upon it, which they call *Chriftening* it; what it *means*, they know not; but the thing *must be done*, not for the Instruction of the Parents, but to Save the *Infant* from *Hell*! “and what a “cruel man must he be, who will grudge “his travel for *such a purpose*, when a few “*words of his mouth* and *motions of his hand* “will do the business?” Strange, that ever men, under the advantages of the Light of the Gospel, should have sunk into such Notions of God and Religion! Again; how many, who never knew one reasonable Use of a Minister’s assistance *a’l* their days, nay, have often treated *all* his Warnings *to flee from the wrath to come* with the most hardened Contempt; yet, when Death stares him in the Face (or, when the like carnal and careless friends about them apprehend them to be at the *last gasp*) they think they are *quite ruined*, if they have not a Minister by them in their *last moments*; but perfectly *safe*, if they have His Prayers over them when they are *just expiring*: and therefore, *then* (and, for saving *needless trouble*, not till *then*) must a Minister be called, *in all haste*! and for what purpose? to instruct them, or awaken them; to direct, or advise them? no; they are *evidently past* all that: for what purpose then? why, to Comfort them: but, alas! what Comfort can we give to a *dying Sinner*, in his last moments; unless we will
venture

venture to *speake peace*, where God has spoke none; and send a poor creature *asleep* and secure, or with *peace and safety* in his mouth, to a terrible awakening? not to say, that he is *then* even *past* receiving Consolation from us, if we had any to give him: for what, then, are we called? why, to *pray over him*, or, as many very grossly express it, to *pray to him!* what is this, but turning our Ministrations and Prayers into *Charms!* to seek them with as much superstition, and to as little reasonable *purpose*, as the poor deluded Papists seek *Extreme-Unction!* as if we carried a *Pass-port* to Heaven in our *Pockets*; or could *open* its *Gates* to a *dying sinner* by our *Breath!*

Nay, were Ministers even called sooner, than they commonly are, to *sinners* on a *death-bed*; it would not much mend the matter. I have already shewn, “ that the great
 “ Call of the Gospel to Repent and Believe
 “ in Christ, with the encouraging Promise
 “ of Salvation enforcing it, are constantly
 “ addressed, by inspired Preachers, to *men*
 “ *in life*; and never, in the whole Word
 “ of God, to *dying men*: and, that our blessed Saviour, and His Apostles, in calling
 “ Sinners to Repentance, are never represented as dealing with any persons, for
 “ this purpose, in their *dying moments*: nor
 “ is there any one Precept, to the Ministers of Religion, either under the Old

“ Testament or the New, to address such
 “ Exhortations and Promises to the Dying,
 “ more than to the Dead.”

Now; if there is neither Precept nor Example, in Scripture, for saying, to any Person on his Death-bed, “ Repent, and iniquity shall not be your ruin;” or, “ Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shall be saved:” the Conclusion may be obvious enough, however strange it may appear; “ that, on *no* warrant of *Scripture*, can we say, to any *dying sinners*, *Repent, and Believe, and You shall be Saved.*” This may appear strange to many; because it is contrary to common opinions, and prejudices taken up without any foundation; and not from any thing unreasonable in the thing itself: but, it is a plain Conclusion, from an unquestionable Observation of matter of Fact. We may, indeed say to them, that “ to Repent as they *can* is the best thing they *can then* do; as thereby they may do some small Honour to God and His Law; and may, this way, give some charitable Warning to Surviving Friends, not to tread in their Steps:” nay, we may further, from the Nature of the thing, and the general Evidence of the Mercy of God, say, that “ it shall be *more tolerable* for them, if they *die Relenting*, than if they *die hardened* in wickedness:” but, that is *all* the length we

we can go: there is *no* Promise, *no* Hope, of Salvation given them by the Gospel.

Visiting the Sick, so as to *Minister* help to them in their distress, is, indeed, a *common* Act of Mercy, and Christian Charity; and will come into the Account of the great Day*: but there is nothing in it *peculiar* to the Office of Ministers of the Gospel; for, in *all* the instructions concerning our Ministrations (which, blessed be God, we have pretty Full and Particular, especially in the Epistles to *Timothy* and *Titus*) there is not *one* Syllable concerning our attending on *Malefactors* to a *Gibbet*; or attending on *any persons* in their *last moments*: nor any mention of visiting persons on a Sick-bed at *all*; except that Direction†, plainly peculiar to the Age of Miracles, of the *Elders of the Church* being called, to *anoint with oil in the name of the Lord*, in order to a miraculous Cure by *the Prayer of Faith*.

If all this is plain Fact, it is very remarkable; as it runs quite cross to the Opinion, too common among us, “that the great use of Ministers to People is in their *dying moments*.” for, from these observations it plainly follows, that, as to *all* this matter, “of attending upon persons on a sick-bed, or in the approach of Death,” we are left to what the Reason of the thing, agreeably to the general tenor of Scripture-

* *Mat.* xxv. 36. 45.

† *Ja.* v. 14, 15.

Revelation, may dictate; which will shew us, that our Assistance may be very useful, and a most agreeable part of our Office performed, towards *dying Saints*, while they are *capable* of receiving Instruction, or Encouragement, from us: *they* may, in that *glo: my hour*, stand in need of *all* the Assistance, or Encouragement which Ministers or Christian Friends, whose minds are more at ease, can give them, in wrestling with their *great* and with their *last Enemy*; and *they* will call for our Assistance, while they *can* make use of it: but of what use our attendance on *dying Sinners* can be, especially when they are *past* hearing any thing we *can* say (the ordinary time that we are called, in all haste, to them) for my part I cannot see; unless it be, to *strengthen the hands of the surviving wicked*, that they *should not return from their wicked way by promising them life!* (Ezek. xiii. 22.) doing what is too liable to that construction; and what many *will* understand so, notwithstanding *all the Cautions we can* give them against putting that construction upon it.

In after-times of the Christian Church, indeed; when Christianity began to be turned into a set of *Forms*, and *Ceremonies*, and *Charms*, instead of “*Living by Faith in the Son of God;*” then, as Superstition crept in, and gave a notable handle to the *Covetous designs* of the Clergy, which the *dying moments* of the Laity were found the fittest seasons

seasons for accomplishing; *then* a great deal of work is made about our *dealings* with persons on a *sick-bed*, or a *death-bed*: and part of these dealings came to be the turning some of the sacred Institutions of Christianity, appointed for a solemn *reception* into the Church *militant*, or for the *perfecting* of *living saints*, into Charms for the benefit of *dying sinners*, or a *passport* into the Church *triumphant*; for those, *viz.* who had money to leave, or their friends enough to give, to the Church, *i. e.* the Clergy; and the turning that *extraordinary* Unction, appointed for a mean of Cure and recovery, into an *ordinary* Unction, of persons whose *recovery* is *despaired* of, for the *forgiveness* of *sins*; a favour only to be obtained by sincere Repentance and Faith in Christ, *working by Love* and actually producing *new obedience*.

But, we know, *the Mystery of Iniquity already wrought*, (2 *Thess.* ii. 7.) even in the days of the Apostles, and very early *then* too: no wonder, then, that it wrought very strongly afterwards; so as, in process of time, to pervert almost the whole Religion of Jesus; and substitute in the place of its genuine Institutions, a system of Tricks and Charms, contrived to frustrate and make void its main Design, of restoring and promoting true Holiness and goodness among men. And in nothing is the Spirit of Popery more conspicuous, than in those wretched *arts of self-deceit*

deceit it leads sinners to trust to, under the daring attempt of imposing upon Almighty God, by certain Compensations substituted in place of a good Life, and that *Holliness without which no man shall see the Lord*: sometimes *compensations in money*, sometimes in *ceremonies and tricks*. Take along, with these *arts of cheating* ourselves and trifling with the Great God, the turning Christianity into a Scheme of Worldly Policy; and you have the whole great out-lines of the Spirit of Popery: which, by these lineaments, plainly enough appears to be the Spirit of *Antichrist*.

But, to return from this Digression, if it may be reckoned one; from all that hath been said upon this head, it is plain; “that the business of the Ministers of Christ is not so much with *dying men*, as is too commonly imagined.” Our business is chiefly with men *in life and health*: to whom, if we can happily persuade them to be *reconciled to God*, we may, upon Scripture-warrant, promise *time and opportunity for carrying on the good work thus begun*.

And, O! that we could persuade people to use our assistance *in time*; and to improve our Ministrations for the great and valuable purpose of them! O! that I might now be so happy, as to persuade sinners effectually to *know*, and to mind, *in this their day*, the things that belong to their peace!

It

It may perhaps be alleged, that the tendency of what I have been all along saying, is to drive people to despair. But, whom? If even there should be a mistake, in what, I think, I have given the clearest and fullest evidence of Scripture for; “ that a *dying* sinner is, by the tenor of the Gospel, cut off from all hopes of Salvation, upon any Repentance he can have in his last moments:” the driving of *dying* sinners to despair, is not so great a harm as it may be apprehended; at least, it can be no *lasting* one: if God, by any such *extraordinary* way (as I think the Gospel excludes) has made them meet for the Heavenly bliss; certainly none shall be excluded from it, merely for having, in the Agonies of a Death-bed, despaired of it, if he is not, in other respects, a *vessel of wrath fitted for destruction*.

But, as the tenor of the Gospel leaves no room for the expectation of so extraordinary a change *then*; certainly, for those who have, all their lives, gone on securely in a sinful course, and hardened their hearts against all God’s gracious Calls and encouraging invitations; for such, I say, to *die* in *Despair*, is better, both for themselves and others, than that they should *die* in presumptuous *Hopes*: far better, for multitudes of surviving sinners; if they are happily brought to improve, in time, the awful Warning! and even better for themselves; as the punishment awaiting

ing them must fall with the less weight, amidst a *fearful looking for it*; than if *sudden destruction*, which they cannot escape, comes upon them, while they are, vainly, saying to themselves *peace and safety*. But, surely, nothing that I have said tends to drive any of you to Despair, who are in life and health, and who yet hear the *joyful sound* of the Gospel: though it may be a necessary warning to those who have gone long, or far, on in a vicious course; that their case is likely to be *now* betwixt Hope and Despair; as they give, or defer, a *present* compliance with the Call of the Gospel. But, to *all* of you I can say, upon the warrant of God's word and Gospel, if you will *now* "Repent, and turn
 "from all your transgressions, iniquity shall
 "not be your ruin:" if you will *now* "Be-
 "lieve on the Lord Jesus Christ, and come
 "unto God by Him, and enter heartily
 "upon a pious and good life;" you shall have your *fruit unto holiness*; shall enjoy, even here, the present fruits of *peace and pleasure in all the ways of wisdom*; and your *end shall be everlasting Life, through Jesus Christ our Lord*: at the same time; if you refuse to comply with this *present* Call of God, and trifle away the *present* Opportunity; no man on Earth can assure you, that it shall not be *your last*: therefore *to-day, if you will hear God's voice, harden not your hearts!* lest you be irrecoverably hardened by
 the

the deceitfulness that is in sin; and provoke God to pass an irreverfible fentence againft you, that you fhall never enter into His Heavenly reft! "Behold now is the accepted time, now is the day of Salvation." How long will you delay and put off a work of the greateft Labour, and, at the fame time, of the greateft Importance, and Necessity? Have you not too long delayed it already? and is it not now high time to fet about it in good earneft? While you may now make fure of Eternal Life; will you run the moft desperate risk of lofing it? It is not a vain thing, Sirs, for it is your Life: Your All is at ftake; and will you ftill, in the moft trifling manner, play it away? May not the time paff of your life fuffice you, more than fuffice you, to have walked in the ways of folly and vanity; and abandoned yourfelves to the conduct of deceitful lufts? Can you too foon begin a happy life? too foon forfake the paths of Darknefs and mifery; and enter upon the ways of light and joy? Thofe ways, in which alone you can know true peace of mind, or the true enjoyment of life.

Why, indeed, fhould it be neceffary to make ufe of the awful terrors of the Lord, to perfuade you to your prefent happinefs? Suppose the Necessity of a speedy hearkening to God's voice, in order to the happinefs of the other world, was not fo great as I have fhown

it to be: nay, that the way to Heaven lay *as open* by a late *Repentance*, as by a *course of Holiness*; that it was as *easy*, and as *ordinary*, to come at it the *one way*, as the *other*: yet, what a source of quiet and tranquillity, throughout your whole life, must it be, to reflect, that your greatest and most important work is not yet to begin; but is happily going forward! — What pleasure, joy and peace, for the *present*, in a Religious and virtuous course, do you *irrecoverably* lose; so long as you defer entering upon it; even though you was ever so sure of saving your souls *at last*!

It must certainly, sinners, be some violent Prejudice against the ways of Holiness, struggling with your natural Love of happiness, that makes you put off and delay that Repentance, which you own to be absolutely necessary to your escaping *future misery*, and coming to the Happiness of the *other world*: but, how groundless are such prejudices! God's *commandments* are not *grievous*: the service of sin is the vilest, and the most grievous, slavery; but the service of God is the most perfect, and the most glorious, Liberty: *Christ's yoke is easy, and his burden is light*: *wisdom's ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace*: tho' there was no *future happiness* provided for those who keep God's commandments; there's a great enough *present reward*, in the *keeping of them*,
to

to allure you to it; were but your eyes open to discern it! What are *all* the pleasures of *sin* (were they even as lasting, as they are but *for a season*) compared to the transcendent delights and satisfactions of Piety and Virtue! to the Joys and triumphs of a soul in which universal Love reigns, and bears the sway over all other affections and passions! a soul who, *dwelling in Love, dwelleth in God, and God in him*: who feels that delight in Love, and in the God of Love; that satisfaction in the thoughts of God, and in the sense of His favour; that joy in uprightness; that peace in a good Conscience; that satisfaction and tranquillity in a well-governed mind, and a well-ordered conversation; which unspeakably exceed *all* the flattering allurements of the world, and the highest gratifications of sense!

Are you quite lost, sinners, to *all* sentiments of Ingenuity, or Gratitude! Can you refuse your Love *one moment* to the most excellent and Amiable Object? Can you indulge yourselves *one moment* longer, in a course of Ingratitude to your greatest Benefactor; who, in courting your Love, courts you to your own Happiness; allures you, by a profusion of Benefits, even while you are Rebelling against Him; and by the prospect of far greater Blessings, beyond your present conceptions; and all, to persuade you to that which, in its own nature, is Best for

yourself; has the most direct tendency to your *present* tranquillity, and to the truest enjoyment of a *present* life! Have you not always found the pleasures of sin mixed and chequered with pain and remorse? and must you not always find them so, while your Consciences are not *seared* as with a *hot iron*; and even then too, while it is the unchangeable nature of irregular passions to give Disturbance and Disappointment? Can, then, these muddy pleasures of sin be once worthy to be compared with the pure Joys of Divine Love, and Friendly Affection; the tranquillity and sweetness of a pure breast; and the *Peace of God, which passeth all understanding*, keeping the *heart and mind*? Can you deliberate *one moment*, in such a Choice! If you knew God, and had any sense of Heavenly Joys; could you possibly fear *losing Him*, or setting your Hearts upon them, *too soon*! Reflect seriously on the follies, disappointments, and dangers of your past conduct; that you may be awakened to an earnest concern to run no more such desperate risks: *what fruit had ye then in those things, whereof ye are now ashamed? for the end of those things is death.*

But; let not the thought of what you have been, and done, drive you to Despondency; or make you Despair of doing better, or of being Accepted of God: say not, *there is no Hope!* Our God is a merciful God;

God; and His grace is sufficient for you: there is Joy in Heaven over one Sinner that repenteth: our compassionate Redeemer will not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax: He has declared that *him who cometh to Him, He will in no wise cast out*: God is more ready to receive returning Sinners into favour, than they are to return to Him; yea, most ready to encourage and forward their weak (if sincere) attempts to return to Him; behold the true Image of our Heavenly Father, in the Father of the *Prodigal*, in the Parable, *Luk. xv.* observing him, in his return to him, while he was yet a great way off, with an eye of compassion! running to meet him! and receiving him with the most endearing tenderness!—Hear the joyful sound, sinners: “*As I live, saith the Lord*”
 “God, I have no pleasure in the death of
 “the wicked, but that the wicked turn from
 “his way and live: turn ye, turn ye, from
 “your evil ways; for why will ye die?”
 Harken to the glad tidings brought us by the Apostles of our Lord and Saviour:
 “God was in Christ reconciling the world
 “unto himself, not imputing their trespasses
 “unto them; and hath committed unto us
 “the word of reconciliation: now then,
 “we are ambassadors for Christ; as though
 “God did beseech you by us; we pray you,
 “in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to
 “God:” let the discoveries of this tender
 mercy

mercy gain your hearts, sinners, and *lead you to repentance*: lay hold of the encouragement offered to you: *come unto God by Christ Jesus: come unto Christ*; and he will give you rest: *take his yoke upon you, and learn of Him, and you shall find rest unto your souls*: “if the son make you free, you shall be free indeed: and, being free from sin, and become the servants of God, you shall have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life; through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

But, I cannot think of leaving this Argument, without some proper Application of what has been said upon it, to those who, by a timely Repentance and Faith in God through Jesus Christ, have happily entered upon a Religious and virtuous life. I may content myself, with referring you to what I have said in the beginning of this treatise, concerning the improvement you may make of this Argument for your Comfort *: as I have also *there* pointed at the improvement you are to make of it for your excitement to your Duty †. Rest not, then, satisfied with any thing you have yet attained to in Religion; but be still *following after* further improvements: “leaving the principles of the Doctrine of Christ; let us go on unto perfection:” not only “be steadfast and unmoveable, but *always abounding in the*

* See pag. 4.

† See also pag. 28, &c. and 72.

“ work of the Lord : grow in grace, and in
 “ the knowledge of God, and our Saviour
 “ Jesus Christ : ” constantly aspire after the
 greatest Perfection of Holiness and goodness.
 And now, to animate and direct your efforts
 this way, I shall set before you some Cha-
 racters of the *Improved*, or (in the stile of
 Grace) the *Perfect Saint* ; whereby He is
 distinguished from those who are *weak in*
Faith, Babes in Christ, and unskilful in the
word of righteousness. They are these : the
purity of the Principle whence His obedience
 flows : the *intenseness and vigour of the heart*,
 in the performance of Duty : *uniformity*, as
 to the several Branches of Piety and Good-
 ness : *constancy and steadfastness*, in opposition
 to fickleness and wavering : continual *aspir-*
ing after the *utmost perfection* in Holiness ;
 and, to crown all, a growing *Humility*.

1. The *purity of the principle*, whence
 His obedience flows. The *improved*, the
perfect, Saint obeys God, as the Best Master,
 not from a principle of *slavish fear* ; or, for
 the sake of Rewards foreign to the Pleasure
 of His service ; but from *Love* to Him and
 to His service itself. The supreme Love of
 God, for the perfectly amiable Excellencies
 of His Nature, is the prevailing disposition
 of his soul : a Love which pursues no other
 enjoyment, than the satisfaction of *beholding*
 and *resembling* the beloved Object. He rises
 superior to all *sensible and earthly images* of
 the

the Heavenly glories and joys; and enters into *direct* views and *fore-tastes* of the real enjoyments above; *beholding the Divine glory*; being *satisfied with His likeness*, and with the most full sense of His Favour: this is the *Heaven* he seeks: the worst *Hell* he dreads, is to be banished for ever from God's blissful *presence*; and therefore, he has a hearty abhorrence of every *departure from the living God*. "The Law of his God is in his Heart: he rejoices in the *way* of His testimonies;" as well as in the *end* it leads to: his Duty, far from being the *task* and *burden*, is the *joy* and *comfort* of his life; and he would chuse it, as such, though he had no life hereafter to look for, or could be sure of coming to it a shorter way. Hence arises,

2. The *intenseness* and *vigour* of his heart, in the performance of Duty. His Devotion is strong and lively: his brotherly Love fervent and active. In *Prayer*, he *pours out his heart before God*: he obtains an ease from his burdens, by *casting them upon the Lord*, who *cares for him*: he derives a cheerfulness to his soul, to set about every duty, from his calling in All-mighty aids: he gives the strongest vent to the feelings of his generous Heart, in *intercessions for all men*; recommending them to His care who can make *all blessings abound to them*. He *Praises God*, with *joyful Heart and Lips*: the inward melody of

of praise is delightful to his soul. He rejoiceth in God's *Word*, as one that findeth great spoil. He remembers His wonderful Love in our Redemption, with returns of the highest Love and Gratitude; and the purest Charity, animated by the Divine Example. He *does good*, as he has opportunity, to all men; and does it with the most hearty good-will: he is *zealous of good works*; and has it for his meat and drink to do the will of his Heavenly Father. Hence flows,

3. *Uniformity*, as to the several branches of Duty. He has a "respect to all God's commandments;" he "cleanses himself from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit;" "perfecting Holiness in the fear of God." He regularly performs the duties of Divine Worship; from a prevailing regard to the valuable Purpose of them, his improvement in a conformity to God in that Moral excellency he adores. Nor does he think, he is then only employed in the Service of God, when he is going about the Duties of immediate Worship; but reckons he exercises Devotion, for the valuable Purpose of it, when, from an habitual regard to God, he goes about the duties of his honest Calling in life, and of the several Stations and Relations in which he is placed, so as to please and resemble Him, who *exercises loving-kindness and righteousness in the Earth, and delights in these things*. Even his diversions are sanctified,

fied, in their intention; and are made subservient to his more important employments. He is holy in all manner of conversation.

4. He is *constant* and steadfast in the ways of goodness. He has got, in a good measure, above these Temptations that formerly turned Him aside; so that they even cease to be temptations to him: he disdains the low gratifications of sense, that come in competition with the superior Joys of a good Heart: he despises the gains of *unrighteousness*; reckoning that *one grain of inward worth excels them all*: he contemns the honours that are of men only; having his heart set upon that *honour which is of God*: welcome to him the losses and troubles of this life; when ordered for him by the Wisdom of his Heavenly Father (he knows) for *his good*: he glories even in tribulations; knowing that *tribulation worketh patience, and patience experience, and experience hope, even that hope which maketh not ashamed*: Rom. v. 3, &c. *for this cause he fainteth not; but though the outward man fail, the inward man is renewed day by day.* This is another Character of the perfect man:

5. He continually aspires after the *utmost perfection* in Holiness; his Love to the untainted perfection of Holiness and goodness, in the blessed God, animates him to aspire after the utmost Resemblance to Him: he studies to *be perfect, as his Heavenly Father*

is perfect : forgetting those things that are behind, and reaching forth to those things which are before ; he presses towards the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. And,

6. All is beautified and adorned by a growing Humility. The further he goes, in Vital Religion ; the more he is sensible of the exceeding breadth of God's Commandment *, and of his own imperfections and defects : the improved Saint has a stronger sense of the odiousness of those sins of infirmity, which still cleave to him ; than he formerly had of grosser acts of wickedness ; as the smallest spots, on a clear and bright Mirror, do strongly appear. Former experience has thoroughly convinced him, that he has no foundation of security in himself : and therefore, he exercises a constant humble dependance on the grace that is in Christ Jesus ; and whatever he does, does all in His name ; giving thanks to God and the Father by Him. He heedfully watches over his own heart ; and is constantly on his guard against those remains of irregular passions and appetites, which he still finds there : under these he groans, being burdened ; and longs for the day, when he shall put off this earthly Tabernacle ; shall get loose from this vain World ; shall shake off these fetters ; and his free Spirit shall be with God, and the glorious

* Pr. cxix. 96.

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Redeemer; with *the innumerable company of Angels and the Spirits of just men made perfect*, to share in *their* perfection and joy, and bear a part in their Heavenly Melody.

What an Amiable Character does this appear, even in the rudest Draught of it! how well worth our *reaching forth* to! and what is there, in *all* this, but what a Christian, by Divine Grace, in a way of faithful watchfulness and constant efforts, may attain to? At the same time, how far do the *bulk*, even of sincere Christians, come short of it? how sensible will the *best* of them be that they do so? but, however far behind, we may *follow after*. Let it be your single aim, Christians, in the use of *all the means of grace*, to become Perfect in Holiness. Do not despise or neglect any of those *means* which the Wisdom of God has prescribed to You; nor vainly reckon Yourself above them: neither rest on the most diligent attendance upon them; without a prevailing regard to the great End of them, Your improvement in Divine Knowledge and true Goodness. Exercise a constant humble Dependence upon *the God of all grace*; and make frequent and earnest applications to Him by Prayer, *in the name* of the blessed Mediator, for His necessary Aids: make these *humble* applications, too, with a joyful confidence, “that He, who
 “ hath begun a good work in You, will
 “ perform

“ perform it until the day of Jesus Christ :” be not discouraged ; nor think that the heights of Devotion and Goodness of a *perfect Saint* are too high for You to aspire after : do not sit down, making lazy complaints ; or lay Yourselves open to *discouraging Spies* of the *Heavenly Canaan* ; nor prove such to Yourselves : do not measure the power of Divine Grace, or the heights a Vigorous Saint may reach to, by the languid carelessness and inactivity of very *imperfect Saints*, if they may be allowed to be *Saints at all* ! give not way to despondency ; but up, and be doing, and the Lord will be with You. The further You go on ; the more will You *find*, that Christ’s *yoke is easy* and his *burden is light* ; the more will You *feel* of that *peace and pleasure* which is in *all the ways of Wisdom* : and thus will Your path be as the *shining Light*, that shineth more and more unto the Perfect Day.

F I N I S.

perform it until the day of Jesus Christ: be not discouraged; nor think that the heights of Devotion and Goodness of a few faint are too high for You to aspire after: do not sit down, making any complaints; or say You have open to yourself the spirit of the Holy Comforter; nor prove much to Yourself: do not measure the power of Divine Grace, or the heights a vigorous Saint may reach to, by the languid carelessness and inactivity of very weak faints: if they may be allowed to depart at all, give not way to despondency; but up, and be doing, and the Lord will be with You. The further You go on, the more will You find that Christ's love is in and His power is light; the more will You feel of that peace and pleasure which is in all the ways of Wisdom: and thus will Your path be as the joining of the feet that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.